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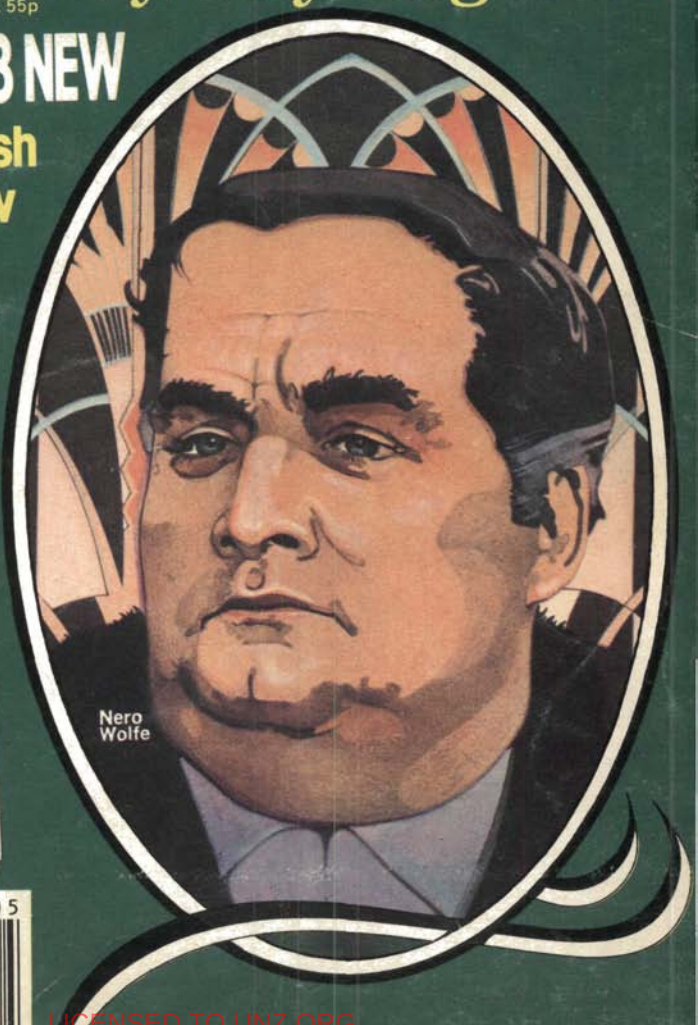

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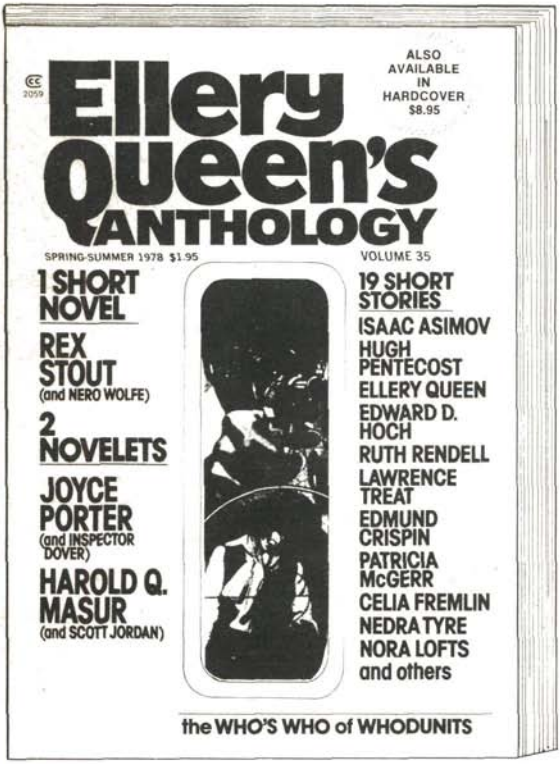

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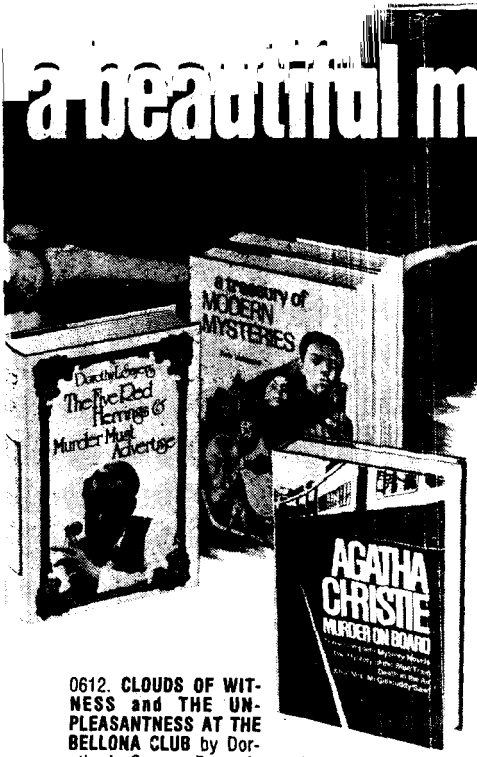
a beautiful murder.



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a *NEW* short-short by

JOHN LUTZ

It's time (long overdue) we told you something about John Lutz. He was born in 1939 in Dallas, Texas, was moved during his childhood to St. Louis, and has lived in the midwest ever since. His past occupations include theater usher, switchboard operator for the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department, and truck driver. "Having acquired a limited knowledge about a number of totally irrelevant subjects," he decided to become a writer. He is an avid sports fan (primarily baseball), likes to travel by car, and to speculate in real estate. His first story appeared in 1967, and he has published three novels and about 100 short stories. He and his family—wife Barbara and three children—now live in St. Louis . . .

IN BY THE TENTH

by *JOHN LUTZ*

There's this sure-fire money-making system not many people know about. Ida, my wife, she's always on me about using my system instead of taking a bit of a chance for a bigger return. She's a born gambler, Ida is. Myself, it's always been the sure thing that's fascinated me, and that I've always pursued. I sleep better than Ida.

The stock market is a temptation sometimes, I'll admit. But when I pick a few promising stocks and watch them, they always seem to go up gradually and steadily so that I wouldn't sell, then nose-dive quickly so that I couldn't sell. It takes a genius to know when to get out of the market, but even a guy like me is smart enough to know when to stay out.

I've thought about investing our life's savings in some kind of business, but then I read the government statistics on how 90%

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of new businesses fail within the first year. Ida calls me cowardly and unimaginative, but it's just that those aren't my kind of odds.

Anyway, my system will make us plenty of money, so that in 20 or 25 years, when I retire from my job as an appliance salesman at Frost's Department Store, Ida and I will be set to decline in luxury.

If you haven't guessed, our "life's savings" is actually an inheritance from this rich uncle on my mother's side. Not many appliance salesmen in their early forties have been able to save $20,000. At least, I never would have without my Uncle Charlie's timely demise. When Uncle Charlie's $20,000 became ours last year is when I started using my system. And I haven't spent a cent of that money since. Ida considers me an overcautious cheapskate, and I'm sure that even the people where I save consider me that. Fine as far as I'm concerned.

It's nothing new, but it is sure, my system. Simply it's this: plenty of savings-and-loan associations, if you've noticed their ads, will pay you a full month's interest if your money's deposited by the tenth of that month. And a savings-and-loan association usually pays a higher rate of interest than a regular bank. However, a regular bank figures its interest from day to day.

Now, what I do is keep two savings accounts, one at Fidelity Savings and Loan, the other at First National Trust Bank across the street. Both places know by now what I'm doing, but they don't and can't do anything to stop me. Because my system is perfectly legal, or I wouldn't risk using it.

On the tenth of each month I draw my entire $20,000 plus interest out of First National, all but $10 to keep the account alive. I cross the street with my money to Fidelity and deposit it there. Then at the end of each month, I draw the money out of Fidelity and redeposit it in First National. Presto! I'm earning ten days of each month's interest at the bank, and a full month's interest at the savings-and-loan association because my money's in by the tenth. That's 120 extra days of interest each year, which, when added to the regular passbook interest rates, amounts to a tidy return and doesn't tie up my money. That could lead to big things for a man who plays it safe, a man with patience.

The stock market, the horses, real-estate speculation—they're not safe, not for me. They're for guys like Uncle Charlie, who died of something like an exploding ulcer. Or for Ida, who lately seems

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to want more than anything to be rich right away.

What I like is to carry my envelope with the $20,000 right across the busy street, enter the cool Fidelity lobby, and walk to Miss Chambers' teller's window. We've become good friends, Miss Chambers and me.

"Morning, Mr. Hoyle," she always says, and with a special sort of smile just for me. She's in her middle twenties, blonde, green-eyed, and pretty in a lean fashion-model sort of way. Not terrifically intelligent, I can tell, but nature has compensated generously. Miss Chambers has set me to thinking, I'll admit. She's the sort of girl who could inspire a man to take a chance.

You know how they are in those places, used to handling large sums of cash. And I always transfer cash rather than a check; there's bulk to the cash that for a short while makes me realize I have something more than a row of numbers in a passbook.

Miss Chambers understands that a man who savors the feel of cash isn't necessarily a tightwad, though she herself is used to a great deal of money passing through her hands every day. She always makes small talk while she counts my twenty-odd thousand like so many cereal box tops, then hands me a receipt. Her talk is none too interesting, but her fingers are nimble. She never makes a wrong count.

And when I walk out of Fidelity, I've been cheered up by Miss Chambers and I know I've just earned ten days' interest on my money.

A pleasant sensation, and a safe sensation. There are other investments, but there's no place your money's safer than in a thick impregnable vault, insured by the government.

On the tenth of August, Miss Chambers looked up from her cash drawer and lost her dazzling smile as she saw the barrel of a gun. The man holding the gun was wearing a dark ski-mask, leaving only his eyes and mouth partly visible. Since it was just before the lunchtime rush, there were only a few other employees in the bank, and only one other customer, an old woman who so far hadn't noticed that she was in the midst of a holdup.

Miss Chambers' teller window was at the end, next to a wall. The robber had turned up the collar of his light raincoat, pulled down his hat brim, and turned his head slightly so that no one but Miss Chambers could see he was wearing a mask. He handed her a note that read simply: FILL THE BAG. The note was

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printed on a brown grocery bag that he slid across the counter toward her. Dutifully, silently, tearfully, she filled the bag with crisp bills, most of them hundreds, many of them with recorded serial numbers in case of just such a traumatic event.

Miss Chambers hoped they would catch this man, hoped he would spend one of the recorded bills immediately so he could be arrested and she could have the pleasure of testifying against him in court. For no one had ever frightened her like this, causing her heart to beat so fast and hard that she was breathless. She hoped the man wouldn't ask her a question, because she didn't think she'd be able to speak past the lump of fear in her throat.

But he said nothing, only nodded, tucked the brown grocery bag under his arm, and walked across the tile floor of the lobby to the door. Miss Chambers saw him artfully remove the ski-mask and hat as he stepped out into the street, out of her sight.

"That man pulled a heist!" the old woman suddenly screamed. She was an avid viewer of TV crime shows. "He was wearing a mask, I tell you! The job's already gone down!"

Miss Chambers didn't hear the woman. She'd fainted just as she pressed the alarm button.

Too late.

"Miss Chambers," I said to her. "Are you all right?" She appeared pale, and her usually sure fingers trembled as they toyed with a gold-plated chain hanging from her slender neck. I leaned forward on the veined marble counter at her window and repeated, "Are you all right?" She hadn't heard me the first time, as she stood staring absently over my head.

"Mr. Hoyle," she said, seeming to snap awake as her eyes focused. "There was a holdup here this morning."

I swallowed. "Here? At Fidelity?"

"No one was hurt," she said, as if to reassure me.

"Well," I said, "give thanks for that."

"Oh, I have, believe me! I was the one he pointed the gun at."

"Did they catch him?"

"No. I sounded the alarm, but it was too late."

I patted her slender hand. "You're a brave girl."

She blushed and lowered her green eyes to the green bills in her cash drawer.

Suddenly I felt particularly brave myself. "Are you doing anything when you get off work?"

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Miss Chambers raised her eyes and I knew I hadn't misjudged either of us. "Only taking the bus home."

"Suppose I drive you?"

What an incandescent smile. "All right, Mr. Hoyle."

"Walter," I said through a smile of my own.

"I'm Dolly," she said.

"A beautiful name for a beautiful flower." I handed Dolly my $20,000 and she began to count, nimbly and surely, though she was obviously distracted by my admiring attention.

When she handed me my deposit receipt her hand lingered on mine. "Till tonight," she said. With some anticipation, I thought.

I nodded to her and walked from the lobby out to the street.

I suppressed a wild laugh all the way to my car. It had worked. I knew the money I'd stolen from Fidelity three hours ago would have recorded serial numbers. By tomorrow morning every bank and savings-and-loan association in the city would have instructions to be on the lookout for those numbers. But no one would figure on the money already being back in Fidelity Savings and Loan. And if someone there did happen to catch a listed serial number within the next day or so, by then the bills would have been integrated into the rest of Fidelity's money. It would be impossible to determine where it had come from or when. The last source even remotely suspected would be miserly Mr. Hoyle, making his regular monthly deposit. You see, that was the real reason for my system. And that was the reason I never minded being called a cheapskate, even though I'm not one.

The $20,000 I had drawn out of First National Trust across the street was still in its envelope beneath my car's front seat. I picked it up and tucked it beneath my right leg along with my deposit receipt. As I started the car, I glanced at my watch.

I had to get to another savings-and-loan association before closing time in order to get my full month's interest, then return in time to pick up Miss Chambers—Dolly.

I knew of one place that was giving away a free toaster.

"Q"

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a *NEW* "Men Who" story by

WILLIAM BRITTAIN

William Brittain wrote this story about the middle of 1977. When we accepted it, we had no Black Widowers tale in inventory, so we decided to delay publication of the Brittain story until Isaac Asimov sent in a new Black Widowers—which, thank St. Edgar, he did. Here, then, in a pair of stories, we give you no less than a dozen detectives working on two entirely different problems . . .

THE MEN WHO READ ISAAC ASIMOV

by *WILLIAM BRITTAIN*

"I called you here today to see if we could agree among ourselves on a sequence of five numbers."

Paul Haskill, the local history teacher, got to his feet, his chair scraping against the bare floorboards of The Merry Tinker tavern. "But before formally presenting our guest, I think I should explain to him that the sole purpose of our little group is to emulate as far as possible an assemblage of men who exist only in the imagination and writings of Dr. Isaac Asimov."

Edgar Varsey, who'd come to Holcomb Mills to write a story for his newspaper, *The Times-Herald,* looked up quizzically at Haskill. His pencil was poised over the notebook in which he had been jotting impressions of the tavern and its occupants.

"Who?" the reporter asked.

"Asimov. That scientist fella who does all the writing." The voice of Jasper Zimmerman, a linesman for the Holcomb Mills Telephone Company, reminded Varsey of the chattering of a squirrel. There was nothing squirrel-like, however, about the other two men at the table. Gabriel Doone, the blacksmith, was

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huge, with muscles that bunched and rippled under his sweat-stained work shirt. And portly Sidney Warwick was the image of small-town respectability as befitted his position as president of the Holcomb Mills National Bank.

"A lot of Asimov's material is about science," said Haskill. "Several of his books are standard references over at our school."

"He's written about history too," Zimmerman put in.

"And mathematics." Numbers, especially as they related to money, were never far from the thoughts of banker Warwick.

"He writes good stories," rumbled Doone. "With rockets and robots and all kinds of exciting things. Better'n television."

Poetry, mythology, the Bible . . . the men tossed subjects at the astounded Varsey like verbal baseballs being peppered about a conversational infield until the reporter shook his head in dismay. "You mean one man has turned out all that?"

Haskill nodded. "Asimov's output is incredible."

"Not so." Zimmerman grinned. "All anyone would need is the ability to use both hands and both feet to keep four typewriters goin' at the same time."

"The Black Widowers, however, are of special interest to us." Haskill indicated Doone, Warwick, Zimmerman, and himself.

"The Black . . . what?" asked Varsey.

"In addition to his other works," Haskill explained, "Dr. Asimov has written a series of detective short stories. They concern a club called the Black Widowers—a group of men, most of whom have out-of-the-ordinary occupations, who meet monthly. At each meeting an invited guest is asked to pose a problem. The Black Widowers then attempt to solve it through a discussion which is carried on while post-prandial drinks are served."

He turned toward the bar at the far end of the room. "And speaking of drinks, the sun's over the yardarm, and I could use one now. Anyone else?"

There was a chorus of assent from around the table.

"Findlay!" Haskill shouted. "A round for us here. Bourbon is traditional, Mr. Varsey. Okay with you?"

The reporter nodded. "Tell me more about the Black Widowers and you four," he said.

"It's five, including Findlay," said Haskill. "At any rate, while talking here one day we found we all shared an interest in the Black Widower stories. So we decided to meet from time to time, to solve problems just as they do."

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"And how many problems have you solved?" asked Varsey.

The table was enveloped in sudden silence. Finally Doone cleared his throat. "You're the first, Mr. Varsey."

"Not that much happens in a small village like Holcomb Mills," added Warwick.

"We daydream a lot," Zimmerman mumbled.

The drinks arrived, carried by an astonishingly agile old man dressed in black, who put Varsey in mind of a cricket. "This is Findlay," said Warwick, "the proprietor of The Merry Tinker, and a charter member of our little group. He seldom offers an opinion, but when he does, he makes incredibly good sense."

"Verra fine o' ye tae say that, Mr. Warwick," said the elfin Findlay in accents reminiscent of plaid kilts, bagpipes, and heather. He passed out the drinks with spasmodic jerks of his hands, then returned to his place behind the bar.

Paul Haskill sipped from his glass and then rubbed his hands together expectantly. "Now then, Mr. Varsey. The problem. Pose it for us, if you please."

Varsey pocketed his notebook and got to his feet. "I guess you already know most of the background material," he began.

"Go over it anyway," urged Zimmerman. "From the beginning. If we're going to be like the Black Widowers, we've got to do things right."

Varsey shrugged good-naturedly. "Okay, here goes. Just up the street here in Holcomb Mills one of the biggest revolutions in retail selling in the country is now going on. The Value Today department store. That's the story I want to get for my newspaper."

"If Value Today gets any bigger," grumbled Doone, "there won't be a parking space in town during business hours."

"Davey Lotus—formerly David Lotocetto—owns the store," the reporter went on. "He was born and brought up right here in Holcomb Mills. As a kid he raised more hell than most, and everybody predicted he'd come to a bad end. But then, at the age of twenty-two, he got into a high-stake poker game."

"I remember it well," sighed Warwick. "He walked away with nearly three thousand dollars—a good part of it my money."

"Yes, but much to the surprise of the townspeople Lotus didn't fritter away his winnings. Instead, he rented an old building that had once been the Grange Hall. Within a month he'd painted VALUE TODAY across the front of it, installed a couple of display windows, and stocked it with merchandise, most of it obtained on

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credit. He sold items usually not found in a small town—the latest fashions, quality sporting goods, exotic perfumes, and such. Essentially, Lotus had created a huge department store, much too large for a village this size.

"People laughed at him, expecting him to go bankrupt within a year. But Lotus had the last laugh. Soon customers were coming from all over the county, then the state, because of a sales gimmick he'd developed."

"He let folks dicker with the clerks over prices," chirped Zimmerman. "It was fun. And for a while we figured we was puttin' one over on ol' Davey. But he was too smart for that."

"Yes, he was," agreed Varsey. "Every item in the store had its price clearly marked. But after the price came a series of letters—for example, $7.00, VUY. Most people just thought it was a shipping code or something. Then, after several months, a clerk let the cat out of the bag what those letters meant. But by that time Lotus was well on his way to becoming a millionaire."

"The letters was really numbers," said Doone.

"Exactly. Davey Lotus used the letters of his own name and assigned to each of them a number. D was 1, A was 2, V was 3, and so on, right up to the final letter S, which was zero. $7.00—VUY meant that the article cost Lotus $3.95, and between $3.95 and $7.00 the clerk was entitled to do a little bargaining. Lotus never claimed the idea was original, but he turned it into a bundle of money.

"Eventually, of course, people caught on. The resulting national publicity didn't do Value Today any harm either, and by then Lotus was into his next selling gimmick—a rare gold coin placed in plain sight somewhere inside the store. For weeks people hunted, until at last it was found—glued to a display bottle of perfume, where it looked like part of the fancy label. Meanwhile, with all those people coming into the store, the cash registers were ringing merrily.

"Senior-citizen beauty contests, games, raffles—Lotus constantly promoted Value Today, and the store continued to thrive. But now he's come up with the greatest sales campaign of all."

"The safe," nodded Haskill.

"Yes," said Varsey. "An old safe which Lotus discovered in the basement of the building. The thing has a combination dial with one hundred numbers on it. Lotus set the combination and placed the safe in one of his display windows. Then he invited one and

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all to try and dial the correct five-number combination. The person who opens the safe door gets the thousand-dollar bill that Lotus has placed inside."

"Huh," grunted Warwick. "With a hundred numbers on the dial the possible variations are almost endless."

"Apparently the people lined up to try their luck don't agree with you," said Varsey. "They come in to open the safe, of course. But they're buying, gentlemen. They're also buying."

"That's the problem, then?" asked Zimmerman. "You want us to see if we can figure out what the correct combination is?"

"I do. My paper sent me down here to do a feature story on Lotus. One of the first people I contacted was Mr. Haskill here. As a history teacher, as well as the village's unofficial historian, I knew he'd have all the background information."

"I also suggested that if our group could figure out the safe's combination it would add reader interest," said Haskill.

"A moment, please," interrupted Warwick, the banker. "We're getting into difficulties here. When the Black Widowers confront a problem, there are clues, hints, inferences that can be made. But here we're presented with nothing but a dial with a hundred numbers on it, from which we're to pick five. Unfair, Mr. Varsey."

"Not as unfair as you think," replied Varsey. "I ran into Lotus out in front of his store and mentioned that very problem."

"What did he say?" asked Doone, the blacksmith.

"He insists the numbers aren't random at all. There are clues."

"Clues?" Zimmerman sat up straighter in his chair. "Where?"

The reporter made an expansive wave of his hand. "Lotus pointed at those display windows of his. 'Right there,' he told me. I took pictures of both of them. Here, look at these."

From his pocket the reporter produced two color photographs. "Here's the left window," he said, holding up one photo. "You can see the safe—the name Mapes etched in the door is apparently the name of the manufacturer—and the line of people. Down in front of the safe are some fake bills and coins to stress the money angle."

He held up the second photograph. "And here's the other window. You'll note the huge telephone dial with the five silk scarves draped vertically through its holes. Above it is a sign that reads: 'From White to Bright, It's a Call to Fashion'."

"What's that over on the other side of the window?" asked Warwick.

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"A series of posters on sale in the stationery department. Great moments in American history. The Revolutionary War is represented by that painting of the three marching men. Then there's Woodrow Wilson, a prospector panning for gold, Charles Lindbergh, and finally, Babe Ruth."

Varsey placed both photographs on the table. "Well, there you have it, gentlemen. What is there in one or both of these pictures that would indicate the correct combination?"

Doone and Warwick took the picture of the safe and examined it closely. Zimmerman and Haskill showed equal interest in the scarves and posters.

Findlay was almost ignored as he brought a second round of drinks. At length Varsey broke the silence.

"Any ideas?"

There was a murmur of assent. The four men sat back in their chairs, each smiling confidently.

"You first, Gabriel," suggested Haskill.

The blacksmith rose ponderously. "A fine piece of metalwork, that safe." He looked about as if daring someone to contradict him.

"We all yield to your knowledge of the subject, Gabriel," said Warwick. "But get on with your theory."

"The people who made that old safe were proud of their work," Doone continued. "Carved the company name right into the steel of the door. Not just painted on or a paper label like today's products. Mapes—a good name. An honest name."

"We agree, we agree," nodded Zimmerman, the phone-company linesman. "But what's the point you're havin' such trouble makin'?"

"Davey Lotus has the safe in his window. Why wouldn't he have the clue to the combination right on the safe itself? Right there on the door? The combination has five numbers. The name Mapes has five letters."

"But how—" Warwick began.

"Let him go on, Sidney," interrupted Haskill. "I see what he's driving at."

"If we find where each of the five letters comes in the alphabet, we'll have five numbers." Doone consulted a greasy bit of paper on which he'd scribbled some notes. "Like M is the thirteenth letter. A is the first. See what I mean?"

Varsey took out his notebook and looked up expectantly at

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Doone. "So your idea of the combination is—"

He quickly wrote down the blacksmith's answer:

13–1–16–5–19

"Who's next?" the reporter asked.

"I'll go, if I may," said Warwick. "Like Gabriel, I too was interested in the window containing the safe. But unlike him, I wasn't taken by the safe itself as much as the display of money."

"I'll bet you talk banking in your sleep, Sidney," said Zimmerman.

Warwick ignored the gibe. "The display of money includes both bills and coins. But why coins, since the money inside is said to be a thousand-dollar bill? Could there be some hidden meaning to the coins? Certainly not in the way they're displayed, just dumped in a pile." He paused dramatically.

Zimmerman groaned. "Sidney, you can say fewer things using more words than anybody else I know."

"Scoff if you will, Jasper. But when I saw the coins, it immediately struck me that America has exactly five coins which make up fractions of a dollar—the penny, the nickel, the dime, the quarter, and the half dollar. Five coins, gentlemen—one for each number of the combination. And each with a specific numerical value. It's quite obvious that my solution is the correct one."

Edgar Varsey put Warwick's solution directly under Doone's:

1–5–10–25–50

then, after a moment's hesitation,

or 50–25–10–5–1

"Mr. Zimmerman?" he said when he'd finished. "Do you agree with either Mr. Doone or Mr. Warwick?"

"It ain't just their ideas I don't agree with," said Zimmerman. "I don't even think they were lookin' at the right window. There's only one place in either window where numbers actually appear. And that's on the big telephone dial with the scarves hangin' from it."

"And you accused me of always thinking about my work," chided Warwick. "I'll just bet you were itching to string a wire from that huge dial."

"You'll be sorry you said that when my numbers open the safe," Zimmerman commented.

"What numbers, Jasper?" asked Haskill.

"Look, the scarves are stuck through the five holes at the top of the dial—numbers 1 through 5. And they hang vertically, so each

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scarf covers a second numbered hole below. The 1 connects with the zero, the 2 with the 9, and so on. Furthermore, the right-hand scarf is white. The further left, the more colorful the scarf, until the last one—which covers the 5 and 6—is red."

"Yeah, we see that in the picture. But so what, Jasper?" queried Doone.

"The sign, Gabriel. The sign. 'From White to Bright.' That's how the numbers go. The white scarf covers the 1 and zero, making 10. That's the first number of the combination, and—"

Varsey made the next entry in his notebook:

10–29–38–47–56

"I guess now it's your turn, Paul." Varsey nodded in Haskill's direction.

"Like the rest of you, I may have let my work get in the way of my detecting," said the teacher. "I chose the same window Jasper did. But I was interested in those five posters on American history. And you know, it wasn't hard to assign a specific number to each of them."

"Oh?" Warwick asked. "How?"

"Take the first one—the painting. It's called 'The Spirit of '76.' Next, Woodrow Wilson. His Fourteen Points—his war aims—are known to any high-school student. Or at least they should be."

Varsey chuckled at the teacher's sternness. "Continue," he urged him.

"The prospector mining for gold?" Haskill went on. "A 'Forty-niner,' of course—the year of the California gold rush." He hummed a few bars of "Clementine," and his listeners nodded their agreement.

"And then Lindbergh. The Lone Eagle, the first man to fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean. What could he represent except the number 1?

"Finally, Babe Ruth. And even though it was finally broken, who can ever forget his record number of home runs?"

"Sixty!" chimed in Warwick and Zimmerman together.

"So there you have it, Edgar. Put my numbers in that book of yours with the rest of 'em."

Varsey did just that:

76–14–49–1–60

"Come on," said the reporter, draining his glass and getting to his feet. "Let's go down and get on that line to try the safe. We'll soon know which one of you has the right answer."

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Two hours later the little group was back at their table in the taproom of The Merry Tinker. Full glasses mirrored despondent faces.

None of the suggested combinations had coaxed the safe's door to open.

"And we wanted to be like the Black Widowers," moaned Zimmerman. "I'm glad that Asimov fella ain't here at this meeting. I'd have to hide my face."

"A failure," said Warwick. "A complete fiasco."

"A bunch of dunderheads trying to be detectives," Doone murmured. "That's us."

"Hey, let's not be too hard on ourselves." Paul Haskill managed a weak smile. "At least we tried. That should get us a mention in your newspaper, huh, Edgar?"

Varsey shook his head. "The public wants to read about winners," he said. "Not losers."

The reporter pushed back his chair. "Well, it's been fun. But I've got to be getting back to—"

"Wait a bit. Wait a bit," came a reedy voice from beside him. Varsey turned and found himself looking at the seamed face of Findlay, the barman and proprietor of The Merry Tinker.

"I could nae let ye go till ye've heard from all of us," said Findlay. "Could I now, Mr. Varsey?"

"But everybody had a turn."

"I didn't. Ye see, trouble with these fellers is, they've nae read the Black Widower yarns thorough enough."

"Come again, Findlay?" said the reporter.

"They clean forgot, sir, that while most of the Black Widowers sit at table for the meal, there's one who's up and about the entire time."

"Henry the waiter," breathed Haskill. "Of course."

"Aye," said Findlay. "Henry. And while the others blather on at great length—just as you gentlemen have done—it's Henry as gets down to findin' the solutions. That waiter has an odd and refreshingly original way of lookin' at problems. Something I've been accused of meself."

"Wait a minute." Varsey eyed Findlay closely. "Are you saying you saw something in one of those windows that none of the rest of us saw?"

"Nae, not a bit of it." Findlay shook his head firmly. "Ye see, them windows ye've been examinin' with such care have naught

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tae do with the clue Davey Lotus was givin' out about the combination."

"But they have to! Lotus told me—" the reporter began.

"Sit down, Henry—ah—Findlay," interrupted Haskill, dragging up a chair from the next table. "Are you telling us you've got the right solution? What are the numbers? How did you get them? What do you mean—"

"Easy, Mr. Haskill. Now first, I'll remind ye all of one set of numbers ye've apparently overlooked. I'm speakin', of course, of the ones Davey Lotus assigned tae his name when he first opened his Value Today store. That story's still well known."

"Yeah, yeah," said Zimmerman impatiently. "D is 1, A is 2, right up to S is zero. And even if we paired 'em—12, 34, 56, and so forth—that idea was tried the first day Lotus put the safe in the window."

"And Lotus said the clue was in the windows." Varsey pounded the table positively. "When we talked in front of the store."

"Did he now?" replied Findlay. "Did he say that in so many words? I didn't get that impression when you first spoke of the conversation."

Varsey wrinkled his brow thoughtfully. "No," he replied slowly. "When I asked him where the clues were, he just said, 'Right there.' But he pointed to the windows."

"Are ye certain sure?" asked Findlay. "Or did he just wave, like?" The little barman made a vague gesture with his hand toward the corner of the room. "Ez ye did yerself, when ye spoke of it earlier."

"Well—yes, that was about the way he did it," admitted the reporter. "But except for the windows, there's nothing special about that old building he could have been pointing to."

"With deepest respect," countered Findlay, "I submit there is something, Mr. Varsey. Ye could hardly uv missed it, standin' where the two o' ye was."

"Look, Findlay," said Warwick, "are you saying we've been studying those damned windows when Lotus was actually pointing to something else? What was it?"

"It was letters—ten uv 'em, tae be exact. At least a foot high. And they spell out the name of Davey Lotus' store—Value Today."

"You—you mean the store sign was the clue, Findlay? But how?"

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"Don't it strike ye odd, sir, that every one o' them ten letters in Value Today is found somewhere in Davey Lotus' own name. Quite a coincidence, ain't it? Only I don't really think it is one. I think Davey had this little scheme in mind from the time he found the safe and opened the store. He named the place according."

"Value Today," mused Haskill while the others buzzed excitedly. "Ten letters. Now if we break them down into two-letter groups—"

"Exactly, Mr. Haskill," grinned Findlay. "Take VA, for example. Now we assign numbers tae them letters, based on the way Davey first used his name to code prices. VA, therefore, becomes 32."

"And LU is 69, because L is the sixth letter in Davey's name, and U the ninth," added Varsey.

"Now ye have it, sirs." Findlay reached across the table and pulled a piece of paper from Varsey's notebook. "Unless I'm far off the mark, these numbers'll open that safe."

He began to write with a stub of pencil:

32–69–48–71–25

Warwick leaped to his feet. "Come on. Let's go down there and give it a whirl."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when there was the sound of a door opening, then slamming shut. A thin lively woman darted into the room, looking about sharply. She spotted Findlay and hurried over to him.

"I got it, Findlay! I got it!" she cried excitedly. "See?"

She reached into the depths of her ample purse and withdrew a rectangle of green paper. It bore a portrait of President Grover Cleveland, as well as the figure 1000 in all four corners.

"Gentlemen," said Findlay, "I'd like ye tae meet Dorrie, my wife. I sent her on ahead tae test me theory."

He peered slyly at the little group at the table. "I did nae think ye'd mind, since yer own interest was purely in the problem itself, not the money involved."

The others looked at one another ruefully, shaking their heads.

"There is one thing ye could do fer me though, Mr. Haskill."

"Anything, Findlay," said the teacher.

"Could ye find me the address uv the gude Dr. Asimov? I'd like tae write him a letter an' ask him tae extend tae each an' every one o' the Black Widowers me personal thanks."

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a *NEW* Black Widowers story by

ISAAC ASIMOV

The Black Widowers meet again, and this time it is chemist James Drake who is the banquet's host. The session's guest—more accurately, the monthly grillee—is a publishing-house editor, and a pretty problem he doth pose! (Why do authors write so gleefully about editors' troubles? You'd think they would be more simpatico, he said ruefully.)

THE NEXT DAY

by ISAAC ASIMOV

Emmanuel Rubin's glasses always gave the illusion of magnifying his eyes with particular intensity when he was aroused. He said, in an intense whisper, "You brought an *editor* as your guest?"

James Drake's train from New Jersey had arrived late and he had, in consequence, almost committed the solecism of being late to his own hostship of the monthly banquet of the Black Widowers. He was in an uncharacteristically snappish mood therefore and said, "Why not?" He flicked the ash from his cigarette and added, "If we can have writers for guests, and even as members, Zeus help us, why not editors?"

Rubin, a writer, said haughtily, "I wouldn't expect a chemist to understand." He looked briefly in the direction of the guest, who was tall and spare, with longish red-blond hair and the kind of abbreviated mustache and beard that gave him the air of a Robin Hood.

Drake said, "I may be a chemist to you, Manny, but to him I'm a writer." Drake tried to look modest and failed signally. "I'm doing a book."

"You?" said Rubin.

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"Why not? I can spell and, judging by your career, that's the only requirement."

"If your guest thinks it is, he has just about the mental equipment needed for an editor. What's his name again?"

"Stephen Bentham."

"And what firm is he with?"

Drake stubbed out his cigarette. "Southby Publications."

"A schlock outfit," said Rubin, with contempt. "They're a sex-and-sensation house. What do they want with you?"

Drake said, "I'm doing a book on recombinant-DNA, which is a sensational subject these days—not that you'd know anything about it."

Mario Gonzalo had just entered, brushing at his brown velvet jacket to remove the city fly-ash. He said, "Come on, Jim, all the papers are full of it. That's the stuff they're going to make new disease germs with and depopulate the world."

Rubin said, "If Mario's heard about it, Jim, you'll have to admit I have too—and everyone else in the world."

"Good. Then my book is what the world needs," said Drake.

Gonzalo said, "The world needs it about as much as it needs air pollution. I've seen two books on the subject advertised already."

"Ha," said Drake, "they're talking about the controversy, the politics of it. I'm going to talk about the chemistry."

"Then it will never sell," said Rubin.

It was at this point that Henry, that paragon of waiters, without whom no Black Widowers banquet could long endure, announced softly to Drake that the gentlemen might seat themselves.

Geoffrey Avalon, the patent attorney, drifted toward Henry, having now had the pleasure of a sedate conversation with the guest—with whom he had talked eye to eye, something which, from his 74 inches of height, he could not often do.

"I detect a fishy aroma, Henry," he said. "What has been planned for this evening?"

"A bouillabaisse, sir," said Henry. "And an excellent one if I may say so."

Avalon nodded gravely, and mathematician Roger Halsted, smiling, said, "Even an average bouillabaisse is excellent and with Henry's encomium, I stand ready to be delighted."

Avalon said, "I hope, Mr. Bentham, you have no objection?"

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"I can't say I've ever eaten it." Bentham spoke with a distinct but not exaggerated English accent, "but I'm prepared to have a go at it. A French dish, I believe."

"Marseillaise in origin," said Halsted, looking as though he were coming very close to licking his chops, "but universal in appeal. —Where's Tom, by the way?"

"Right here," came an exasperated voice from the steps. "Damn taxi driver— Thanks, Henry." Thomas Trumbull, the code-and-cipher expert, his tanned forehead creased and furrowed into lines of anger, gratefully took the Scotch-and-soda. "You haven't started eating, have you?"

"Just about," said Gonzalo, "and if you hadn't arrived, Roger would have had your share of the bouillabaisse, so it would have been a silver lining for someone. What's with the taxicab?"

Trumbull seated himself, took another invigorating sip of his drink, buttered a roll, and said, "I told the idiot to take me to the Milano and the next thing I knew I was at some dive movie on West 86th Street called the Milano. We had to make our way through four extra miles of Manhattan streets to get here. He claimed he had never heard of the Milano Restaurant, but he did know that flea dive. It cost me more than three bucks extra in taxi fare."

Rubin said, "You're pretty far gone, Tom, if you couldn't tell he was going northwest when you wanted to go southeast."

"You don't think I was watching the streets, do you?" growled Trumbull. "I was lost in thought."

Avalon said austerely, "You can't rely on the local wisdom of the New York taxidriver. You ought to have said explicitly, '5th Avenue and 13th Street'."

"Thanks a lot," said Trumbull. "I shall instantly turn the clock back and say it."

"I presume there'll be a next time, Tom, and that you're capable of learning from experience," said Avalon, and received a scowl for his pains.

After the bouillabaisse arrived, there was a lull in the conversation as the banqueters concentrated on the evisceration of mussels and the cracking of lobster shells.

It was Drake who broke it. He said, "If we consider recombinant-DNA—"

"We aren't," said Rubin, spearing a scallop neatly.

"—then the whole argument concerns benefits that no one can

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demonstrate and dangers that no one can really pinpoint. There are only blue-sky probabilities on either side and the debaters make up for their lack of hard knowledge by raising their voices. What I propose to do is to go into the chemistry and genetics of the matter and try to work out the real chances and significance of specific genetic change. Without that, both sides are just searching for a black cat in a dark room that isn't there."

Avalon said, "And all this for the general public?"

"Certainly."

"Isn't that rather heavy going for the general public?"

"It isn't for the comic-book audience, but I think I can manage the *Scientific American*-to-*Natural History* range. Tell them, Bentham," said Drake, with perhaps a trace of smugness. "You've seen the sample chapters."

Bentham, who had tackled the bouillabaisse with a certain tentativeness but had grown steadily more enthusiastic, said, "I can only judge by myself, but I suspect that since I follow the line of argument, the average college man ought to."

"That still limits your audience," said Gonzalo.

Bentham said, "We can't say that. It's a very hot subject and, properly promoted—"

"A Southby specialty," muttered Rubin.

"It could catch on," Bentham said. "People who don't really understand might nevertheless buy it to be in fashion; and who knows, they might read it and get *something* out of it."

Drake tapped his water glass as Henry began to dole out the brandy. He said, "If everyone is sufficiently de-fishified and if Henry will remove the towels and finger bowls, I think we may start to grill our guest, Mr. Stephen Bentham. —Tom, will you do the honors?"

"Glad to," said Trumbull. "Mr. Bentham, it is our custom, ordinarily, to inquire as to how a guest justifies his existence. In this case, I suppose we can allow the fact that you are involved with the production of a book by our esteemed colleague, Dr. Drake, to speak for you. We will therefore pass on to more mundane questions. You seem young. How old are you?"

"Twenty-eight."

"I have the feeling you have not been in the United States long. Am I right?"

"I've been living and working here for about five months, but I have been here before on brief visits. Three times."

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"I see. And what are your qualifications for your post?—as an editor, that is."

"Not overwhelming." Bentham smiled suddenly, an oddly charming and rueful smile. "I have done some editing for Fearn and Russell in London. Rather happy with them—low-key concern, you know, but then, British publishing generally is low-key."

"Why throw that over to take a job with an American firm where the pressures are bound to be greater? They are greater, I assume."

"Very much so"—again the rueful smile—"but there's no mystery as to why I came. The explanation is so simple that it embarrasses me to advance it. In a word—money. I was offered three times my British salary, and all moving expenses paid."

Halsted intervened suddenly. "Are you a married man, Mr. Bentham?"

"No, Mr. Halsted. Quite single, though not necessarily celibate. However, single men can use money too."

Rubin said, "If you don't mind, Tom, I would like to add the reverse of the question you asked. I can see why you've joined Southby Publications. Money is a potent argument. But why did that schlock concern hire you? You're young, without too much experience, and they're not the kind of firm to hire promising young men out of benevolence. Yet they triple your salary and pay your moving expenses. What have you got on them?"

Bentham said, "I met Mr. Southby on one of my earlier trips and I think he was rather taken with me." His fair skin turned a noticeable pink. "I suspect it was my accent and my appearance. Perhaps he felt I would lend an air of scholarship to the firm."

"A touch of class," murmured Avalon, and Bentham turned pinker still.

Trumbull resumed the questioning. "Manny calls Southby Publications a schlock concern. Do you agree with that?"

Bentham hesitated. "I don't know. What does the expression mean?"

Rubin said, "Cheap, worthless books, sold by high-pressure campaigns hinting at sex and sensationalism."

Bentham remained silent.

Drake said, "Go ahead, Bentham. Anything you say here will never go beyond these walls. The club observes complete confidentiality."

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"It isn't that, Jim," said Bentham, "but if I were to agree, it might wound your feelings. You're an author of ours."

Drake lit another cigarette. "That wouldn't bother me. You've been hired to give the firm a touch of class and you'll do my book as another touch of class."

Bentham said, "I grant you that I don't think much of some of the books on the list, but Dr. Drake is right. Mr. Southby doesn't object to good books if he thinks they will sell. He is personally pleased with what he has seen of Dr. Drake's book, even enthusiastic. Perhaps the firm's reputation can be improved."

Avalon said, "I would like to put in my oar, Tom, if you don't mind. —Mr. Bentham, I am not a psychologist or a tracer of men's thoughts through their expressions. I am just a humble patent attorney. However, it seems to me that you have looked distinctly uneasy each time you mentioned your employer. Are you sure there is nothing you are keeping from Dr. Drake that he ought to know? I want an unequivocal answer."

"No," said Bentham quickly, "there is nothing wrong with Dr. Drake's book. Provided he completes the book and that the whole is of the quality of the parts we have seen, we will publish and then promote it adequately. There are no hidden reservations to that statement."

Gonzalo said, "Then what are you uneasy about? Or is Jeff all wrong about your feelings?" He was gazing complacently at the caricature of Bentham he had produced for the guest-gallery that lined the walls of the meeting room. He had not missed the Robin Hood resemblance and had even lightly sketched in a feathered hat in green, of the type one associated with the Merry Men.

Bentham said, in sudden anger, "You could say I'm uneasy, considering that I'm about to be bloody well slung out on my can."

"Fired?" said Gonzalo, on a rising note.

"That's the rough one-syllable version of what I have just said."

"Why?" said Drake, in sudden concern.

"I've lost a manuscript," said Bentham. "Not yours, Dr. Drake."

Gonzalo said, "In the mails?"

"No, through malice, according to Southby. Actually, I did every ruddy thing I could do to get it back. I don't know *what* was in that man's mind."

"Southby's?"

"No, the author's. Joshua Fairfield's his name."

"Never heard of him," said Rubin.

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Trumbull said, "Suppose you tell us what happened, Mr. Bentham."

Bentham said, "It's a grim stupid thing. I don't want to cast a pall over a very pleasant evening."

Trumbull said, "Sorry, Mr. Bentham, but I think Jim warned you that answering our questions is the price of the meal. Please tell us exactly what happened."

Bentham said, "I suppose the most exciting thing that can happen in a publishing house is to have something good come in over the transom; something good that has not passed through the hands of a reputable agent and is not by a recognized author; something that has reached you by mail, written by someone whom no one has ever heard of.

"Aside from the sheer pleasure of the unexpected windfall, there is the possibility that you have a new author who can be published profitably for years to come, provided the work is not that of a one-book author—which is not an unheard-of phenomenon."

Rubin began, "Margaret Mitchell—" and stopped when Trumbull, who sat next to him, elbowed him.

"Anyway," said Bentham, jarred only momentarily by the interruption, "Southby thought he had one. One of the readers brought it to him in excitement, as well he might, for readers don't often get anything that's above the written-in-crayon-on-lined-paper level.

"He should have come to an editor—not necessarily me—with the manuscript, but he chose to go directly to Southby. I presume he felt there might be a deal of credit for the discovery and he didn't want Southby to be unaware of the discoverer. I can't say I blame him.

"In any case, Southby was infatuated with the manuscript, called an editorial conference, said he was accepting the book and had notified the author. He explained, quite enthusiastically, that it was to get the full Southby treatment—"

Rubin said indignantly, "Up to and including cooking the best-seller lists. —Tom, if you give me the elbow again, I'll break it off."

Bentham said, "I daresay you're right, Mr. Rubin, but this book deserved all it could get—potentially. Southby said he thought it needed work and he gave it to me to edit. That struck me as a

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remarkable sign of confidence and I was rather gung-ho on the matter. I saw a rise in salary on the horizon if I could manage to carry it off. The other editors didn't seem to mind though. One of them said to me, 'It's your butt that's in the sling if this doesn't work, because Southby's never wrong.' "

Avalon said gravely, "It sometimes happens that when the boss makes a mistake, the underling tabbed to reverse the mistake is fired if he fails."

Bentham nodded. "The thought occurred to me, but it stimulated me all the more. The scent of danger sharpens the desire to be in at the kill, you know.

"Well, I went over the manuscript in a painstaking manner. I read through it once at moderate speed to get a sense of the whole and was not displeased. Southby's description of it was not wrong. It had good pace and was rich in detail. A long family saga—a rough and domineering father, a smooth and insinuating mother in a rather subtle battle over the sons, their wives, and their children. The plot was interlocking, never-halting, and there was enough sex to be suitable for Southby, but the sex *worked*. It belonged in the story.

"I turned in a favorable report on the book, indicating its chief flaws, and how I proposed to handle them. It came back with a large 'Very Good' on it, so I went to work. It had to be tightened up. The last thing any beginner, however talented, learns is to tighten. Some scenes were misplaced or misemphasized and those had to be corrected.

"I am not myself a great writer and could never be, but I've studied writing that *is* great sufficiently to be able to amend and improve what is already written well, even if, from a cold start, I could not produce anything nearly as good. It took me some six weeks of intense work to complete the job. I knew that my head was on the line, but I was not about to lose the war for lack of a horseshoe nail.

"It wasn't till after I had done a thorough piece of work that I called in the author, Joshua Fairfield. I thought it better that way. Had I called him in *en route,* so to speak, there would have been acrimonious arguments over the changes and much time wasted on trivial points. If he could see the revisions as a whole, I felt he would be satisfied. Any minor disagreements could be easily settled.

"Or so I reasoned, and perhaps I needed a little more experience

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myself. The author arrived and we met for the first time. I can't say I particularly liked his looks. He was about my age but he had a rather somber cast of countenance, small dark eyes—almost beady—and poor teeth.

"I went through the amenities. We shook hands. I told him how pleased we all were with the book, how well it was going to do, the sales promotion we would give it, and so on.

"I then said, rather casually, in order to emphasize the minor nature of the changes—compared to what was not changed, you understand—that I had taken the liberty of introducing some small emendations here and there. At that he sat upright and his small eyes bulged. He seized the manuscript which was on the table before us, shook some of it out of one of the boxes, riffled through the pages where I had made the necessary changes in a fine-point pencil, done quite lightly to allow for further changes, and *shrieked.*

"He really did. He screamed that I had written something on every page and that he would have to get the whole thing retyped and that the bill would go straight to me. Then he seized the boxes and was gone. I couldn't stop him. I swear to you, I couldn't move, I was that thunderstruck.

"—But not panicky, either. The manuscript had been photocopied and I had made copious notes of the changes I had made. Since he was under contract—or so I assumed—and since our contract gave the firm the right to make necessary changes, we could publish over his objections. He might proceed to sue us, but I don't think he could have won, and the publicity would simply have sold more books.

"The trouble is that when I went to see Southby and tell him what had happened, it turned out there was no signed contract and then everything came apart. It seemed that Southby and Fairfield were haggling over the amount of the advance. I suppose I might have been more diplomatic when I heard this. It was *not* a good idea for me to ask Southby if, in view of the advertising budget being planned, it made much sense to haggle over a matter of two thousand dollars in the advance."

Rubin grunted. "Well, now you know something about Southby."

"I know he didn't like to have it look as though it were his fault. He ordered me to get that manuscript back and he made it pretty clear that I was in for it if I did not.

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"It proved difficult from the start. I tried Fairfield at his apartment, I tried him on the phone. It took me three days and then he finally answered. I managed to keep him on the phone. I told him he could have the advance he wanted. I told him that every change was negotiable and that we could go over the book line by line—which was exactly what I had tried desperately to avoid in the first place; and I warned him that no publisher would take it precisely as it was.

"He said, with a rather snide and unpleasant snicker, that that was not so, that another publisher *would* take it exactly as it was. He had still not turned it over to that other publisher but he hinted that he might.

"I took that as a bluff and didn't let it rattle me. I just told him quietly that no firm could guarantee a best-seller as certainly as Southby could, reminded him of some of our other books—"

Rubin said, "Sure. Trash like *Dish for the Gods.*"

Avalon said, "Let him speak, Manny."

"Well," said Bentham, "we were on the phone for over an hour and he finally put it to me straight. Would I publish it as written and I repeated, just as straight, that we could negotiate every change, but that there would have to be some changes—for the manuscript's own good.

"He remained truculent and nasty, but he finally gave in, just like that. He said he would deliver it the next day and I said enthusiastically—and trying to hide my relief—that that was top hole, and that he was to go to it, the sooner the better, and I would send a messenger if he'd like. He said, no, he didn't want any damn messenger, and hung up."

Halsted said, "Happy ending."

"No, because he never delivered the manuscript. We waited a week and then Southby finally got him on the phone and all he got out of Fairfield were snarls to the effect that his paid monkey, Bentham, could keep his damn sarcasm and shove it and we would get no manuscript from him on any terms, or words to that effect.

"That's where it stands. Needless to say, I was *not* sarcastic. I was perfectly reasonable and diplomatic at all times. I was firm on the key point of revisions, but not offensively so. In fact, he had agreed to deliver it the next day. As far as Southby was concerned, however, I had lost the manuscript through my malicious treatment of the man, and he's out of his mind with rage."

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Drake said, "But he hasn't fired you yet, Bentham. And if he hasn't, maybe he won't."

"No, because he still has hopes. Fairfield never told me which other publisher he had shown the manuscript to, and Southby is trying to call round to see if he can find it and establish a prior claim. He fears, I think, that the publisher who has it will disclaim any knowledge of it till they have it in production, but he's trying. Of course, I told him that Fairfield was bluffing and was probably psychotic, but he's not listening to me these last few days.

"In fact, if Southby comes up with nothing over these next few days, I'll be sliding along the street with his bootmarks clearly imprinted on my rear end. This is all the more certain since he must realize that none of this would have happened if he had not played silly haggling games over pin money. He would certainly have had the man under contract otherwise. Firing me will be the evidence he needs for all the world, and most of all for himself, to show that I was to blame and not he."

Halsted said, "But it would be difficult for you to work for Southby after this anyway, wouldn't it? You'd be better off somewhere else."

Bentham said, "Unquestionably—but in my own time and at my own resignation. After all, the editorial field is not exactly wide-open now and I might have difficulty finding a new position, and with an as-yet thin reserve of savings that prospect does not fill me with delight. Southby might well try to see to it that my chances were even less than normal."

Rubin said, "You mean, he would try to blacklist you? I wouldn't put it past him."

Bentham's gloom showed him to be in full agreement. He said, "Still, what's worst is that with my editing we would have had a good book there. It would be something we could be proud of. Southby and Fairfield could make a fortune and I could make a reputation that would move me on to a much better position. And the world would have a whacking good first novel with the promise of better books to come.

"Fairfield has the makings of a great novelist, blast his soul, and I have my editorial pride and want to be part of that greatness. And I was *not* sarcastic and he *did* give in. He *did* say he'd deliver it the next day. Why in the devil's name didn't he? That's what bothers me—why didn't he?"

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There was a rather dank pause. Avalon finally said, "There may be an explanation for this. There have been first-class men of genius who have been monsters of villainy in their private lives. Richard Wagner was one; Jean-Jacques Rousseau was another. If this man, Fairfield, is bluffing, and I rather guess he is, too, then he may simply have judged Southby to be a kindred soul and he feels that you will be fired. It's what he would do in Southby's place. Then, when you are gone, he will show up with the manuscript."

"But why?" said Bentham.

"No puzzle there, I think," said Avalon. "In the first place, you dared tamper with his precious manuscript and he feels you must be punished. In the second, once you are gone he can be reasonably certain that Southby, after all this, will publish his manuscript exactly as written."

"Then why did he say he would deliver it the next day?"

Avalon bent his formidable eyebrows together for a moment and said, "I suppose he felt you would tell Southby, ebulliently, that the thing was in the bag—as you did—and that Southby's anger, sharply intensified by falsely raised hopes, would explode and make certain your rapid firing."

"And all that stuff about my sarcasm would then be just designed to further infuriate Southby?"

"I should think so. Yes."

Bentham thought about it. "That's a pretty dismal picture you've painted. Between Fairfield and Southby there's no escape."

Avalon looked uneasy. "I'm sorry, Mr. Bentham, but that's the way it looks to me."

Bentham said, "I can't believe it. I spoke to the man for an hour or more on the phone. He did not *sound* vindictive. Stubborn and nasty, yes, but not personally vindictive."

Avalon said, "I hate to be the insistent advocate of a solution personally abhorrent to me, but surely you were not looking for vindictiveness and would not be expected to see if it were not absolutely in plain view."

Bentham said desperately, "But there's more. I have read his book and you have not. I believe no one, however skillful, can write a book completely alien to his own philosophy and—"

"That's nonsense," said Rubin, "I can write a piece of fiction hewing to any philosophy you please. I could write one from the Nazi point of view if I were of a mind to, which I'm not."

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"You couldn't," said Bentham. "Please don't interpret that as a challenge, but you couldn't. —In Fairfield's book there were a variety of motivations, but none was the kind of motiveless malignity some people attribute to Iago. There was no unreasoning anger arising over trivial causes."

"But that's the very point," said Avalon. "It seems a trivial cause to you but you don't see through this man's eyes. Changing his novel in even a minor way is to him unforgivable and he'll hound you down for it."

Trumbull said, in a troubled voice, "I hate to join in this gallows-fiesta, Mr. Bentham, but Jeff sounds as though he might be right."

"Ah," said Rubin suddenly, "but I don't think he is."

Bentham turned in his direction eagerly. "You mean you don't think Fairfield is out to get me?"

Rubin said, "No. He's mad at you, surely, but not to the point of wanting to cut his own throat. What we've got to do is look at this thing carefully with writer-psychology in mind. No, Mr. Bentham, I don't mean trying to see a writer's personality in his writing, which I still say can't be done for any really good writer. I mean something that holds for *any* beginning writer.

"I grant that a beginner might feel psychotic enough to fly into a fury at any changes imposed on his sacred prose, but even that pales into nothing compared to another need—that of getting into print.

"Remember, this guy was haggling with Southby over a few thousand dollars in advance money, and what was that to him? We sneer at Southby for sticking at a small sum when hundreds of thousands might be in view. Isn't it even queerer that the author should do so and risk not only a fortune, but publication altogether? Is it conceivable that a beginner who must have worked on his book for years would even dream of risking failure to publish by haggling over the advance?"

Avalon said, "If he were the semi-psychotic individual whom Mr. Bentham has described, why not?"

Rubin said, "Isn't it much more likely that he *already* had another publisher on the string, and that he tried Southby only because of the firm's reputation for turning out best-sellers? His quarrel over the advance was his effort to make the two firms bid against each other in an auction they didn't know was taking place. Then, when Bentham tried to make changes, he turned

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back to the first publisher, who perhaps was willing to make fewer changes, or even none."

Bentham said, "Do you mean, Mr. Rubin, that Fairfield originally went to some publisher—call him X—and X read the manuscript, suggested revisions, Fairfield took it back, presumably to revise, but brought it to us instead. When we offered a lower advance and suggested even more revisions, he took it back to X?"

"Yes, and you marked up his copy," said Rubin. "I think that annoyed him more than the revisions. It meant he had to have the copy retyped *in toto* before resubmitting it. Even erasing the pencil marks would leave some smudges and he might be a little shy of letting X know he was playing tricks with the manuscript.

"After all, you got him on the phone three days after he had stormed out and he already had another publisher on the hook. —After only three *days?* Three *months* would be astonishing."

Bentham said, "That's why I assumed he was bluffing."

"And risk publication? No, Publisher X exists all right."

Trumbull said, "I must be going soft, but I've switched sides. You've convinced me, Manny."

Bentham said, "Even if you're right, Mr. Rubin, I'm still in a hopeless position."

"Not if you can prove this Fairfield was playing games. Once Southby sees that, he'll be furious with the author, not with you. Then you can bide your time and resign whenever it suits you. In fact, we can go further. If we can tell Southby who the other publisher is, he will call his opposite number there and thrash it out. He won't have the chance of water on Venus, but that will put him in a rage at both Fairfield and the competing publisher, and he won't have time for you."

Bentham said, "But for that I would have to know who Publisher X is, and I don't. And without that Southby simply won't believe the story. Why should he?"

Rubin said, "Are you sure Fairfield didn't mention the publisher's name?"

"I'm sure."

Halsted said, with a mild stutter, "How would you know? You've only been in the country a few months and may not know all the publishers."

"There are hundreds in New York and surrounding areas and I certainly don't know them all," said Bentham. "I know the larger

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ones, though. Surely X would be among the larger ones."

Rubin said, "I should think so. No hint at all?"

"If there was, it whizzed by me."

Rubin said, "Think. Go over the conversation in your mind."

Bentham closed his eyes and sat quietly. No one else made a noise except Drake, whose bolo-tie tip clinked against his water glass when he reached forward to stub out a cigarette.

Bentham opened his eyes and said, "It's no use. There's nothing."

Drake looked toward the sideboard where Henry was standing. "This is a serious situation, Henry. Do you have any suggestions?"

"Only the publisher's name, sir."

Bentham looked round in astonishment, "What?"

Trumbull said hastily, "Henry is one of us, Mr. Bentham. What are you talking about, Henry? How can you possibly know?"

"I believe the author, Mr. Fairfield, mentioned it in his phone conversation with Mr. Bentham."

Bentham said, on the edge of anger, "He did *not!*"

Henry's unlined face showed no emotion. "I beg your pardon, sir, I do not mean to offend you, but you inadvertently omitted an important part of the story. It was rather like Mr. Trumbull's misadventure in the cab when he left out an important part of the directions. Or like Dr. Drake's point that those who argue about recombinant-DNA do so without adequate knowledge of the fundamentals."

Gonzalo said, "You mean we're looking for a black cat in a dark room that *is* there?"

"Yes, sir. If Mr. Bentham had told his story otherwise, the whereabouts of the black cat would be obvious."

"In what way could I have told the story otherwise?" demanded Bentham.

"You told the story with indirect quotations throughout, sir, and thus we never got the exact words anyone used."

"For a very good reason," said Bentham. "I don't remember the exact words. I'm not a recording device."

"Yet sometimes in indirect quotation, a person is reported as saying something he could not possibly have said in direct quotation."

"I assure you," said Bentham, "my account was accurate."

"I'm sure it was, within its limitations, sir. But if there is a

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Publisher X, why did Mr. Fairfield promise to deliver the manuscript the next day?"

Bentham said, "Oh, God, I forgot about that. Are we back to motiveless malignity?"

"No, sir. I would suggest he didn't say that."

"Yes, he did, Henry," said Bentham. "I'm unshakeable in that."

"Do you wish to put his remark into direct quotations and maintain that he said, 'I will deliver the manuscript the next day.' "

Bentham said, "Oh, I take your meaning. 'The next day' *is* a paraphrase, of course. He said, 'I will deliver the manuscript tomorrow.' What's the difference?"

Henry said, "And then you agreed enthusiastically, urged him to do so at once, and offered to place a messenger at his service. You don't think that sounded like sarcasm, sir?"

"*No.* He said, 'I will deliver the manuscript tomorrow' and I was enthusiastic. Where's the sarcasm?"

"To Morrow," said Henry carefully, pronouncing it as two words.

"Good God," said Bentham blankly.

Rubin brought his fist down on the table, "Damn! William Morrow and Company," he said, "one of New York's larger publishing houses."

"Yes, sir," said Henry. "I looked it up in the telephone book to make certain, immediately after Mr. Bentham's account of the phone conversation. It is located at 105 Madison Avenue."

Gonzalo said, "There you are, Mr. Bentham. Just tell your boss to check with Morrow and Company and he can carry it from there."

"And fire me for stupidity. Which I deserve."

"Not a chance," said Gonzalo. "Don't tell him the literal truth. Tell him that as a result of clever detective work you uncovered the facts through a confidential source you cannot reveal."

Henry said, "After all, sir, confidentiality is the policy of the Black Widowers."

"Q"

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A memorable short-short . . . we doubt if you will ever forget the frisson d'horreur it evokes . . .

I CAN'T HELP SAYING GOODBYE

by ANN MACKENZIE

My name is Karen Anders I'm nine years old I'm little and dark and near-sighted I live with Max and Libby I have no friends

Max is my brother he's 20 years older than me he has close-together eyes and a worried look we Anders always were a homely lot he has asthma too

Libby used to be pretty but she's put on weight she looks like a wrestler in her new bikini I wish I had a bikini Lib won't buy me one I guess I'd stop being so scared of going in the water if I had a yellow bikini to wear on the beach

Once when I was seven my father and mother went shopping they never came home there was a holdup at the bank like on television Lib said this crazy guy just mowed them down

Before they went out I knew I had to say goodbye I said it slow and clear goodbye Mommy first then goodbye Daddy but no one took any notice of it much seeing they were going shopping anyway but afterwards Max remembered he said to Libby the way that kid said goodbye you'd think she knew

Libby said for gosh sakes how could she know be reasonable honey but I guess this means we're responsible for her now have you thought of that

She didn't sound exactly pleased about it

Well after I came to live with Max and Libby I knew I had to say goodbye to Lib's brother Dick he was playing cards with them in the living room and when Lib yelled Karen get to bed can't you I went to him and stood as straight as I could with my hands clasped loose in front like Miss Jones tells us to when we have choir in school

I said very slow and clear well goodbye Dick and Libby gave me a kind of funny look

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Dick didn't look up from his cards he said goodnight kid

Next evening before any of us saw him again he was dead of a disease called peritonitis it explodes in your stomach and busts it full of holes

Lib said Max did you hear how she said goodbye to Dick and Max started wheezing and gasping and carrying on he said I told you there was something didn't I it's weird that's what it is it scares me sick who'll she say goodbye to next I'd like to know and Lib said there honey there baby try to calm yourself

I came out from behind the door where I was listening I said don't worry Max you'll be okay

His face was blotchy and his mouth was blue he said in a scratchy whisper how do you know

What a dumb question as though I'd tell him even if I did know

Libby bent down and pushed her face close to mine I could smell her breath cigarettes and bourbon and garlic salad

She said only it came out like a hiss don't you ever say goodbye to anyone again don't you ever say it

The trouble is I can't help saying goodbye

After that things went okay for a while and I thought maybe they'd forgotten all about it but Libby still wouldn't buy me a new bikini

Then one day in school I knew I had to say goodbye to Kimberley and Charlene and Brett and Susie

Well I clasped my hands in front of me and I said it to each of them slow and careful one by one

Miss Jones said goodness Karen why so solemn dear and I said well you see they're going to die

She said Karen you're a cruel wicked child you shouldn't say things like that it isn't funny see how you made poor little Susie cry and she said come Susie dear get in the car you'll soon be home and then you'll be all right

So Susie dried her tears and ran after Kimberley and Charlene and Brett and climbed in the car right next to Charlene's mom because Charlene's mom was doing the car pool that week

And that was the last we saw of any of them because the car skidded off the road to Mountain Heights and rolled all the way down to the valley before it caught fire

There was no school next day it was the funeral we sang songs and scattered flowers on the graves

Nobody wanted to stand next to me

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When it was over Miss Jones came along to see Libby I said good evening and she said it back but her eyes slipped away from me and she breathed kind of fast then Libby sent me out to play

Well when Miss Jones had gone Libby called me back she said didn't I tell you never never never to say goodbye to anyone again

She grabbed hold of me and her eyes were kind of burning she twisted my arm it hurt I screamed don't please don't but she went on twisting and twisting so I said if you don't let go I'll say goodbye to Max

It was the only way I could think of to make her stop

She did stop but she kept hanging on to my arm she said oh god you mean you can make it happen you can make them die

Well of course I can't but I wasn't going to tell her that in case she hurt me again so I said yes I can

She let go of me I fell hard on my back she said are you okay did I hurt you Karen honey I said yes and you better not do it again and she said I was only kidding I didn't mean it

So then I knew that she was scared of me I said I want a bikini to wear on the beach a yellow one because yellow's my favorite color

She said well honey you know we have to be careful and I said do you want me to say goodbye to Max or not

She leaned against the wall and closed her eyes and stood quite still for a while and I said what are you doing and she said thinking

Then all of a sudden she opened her eyes and grinned she said hey I know we'll go to the beach tomorrow we'll take our lunch I said does that mean I get my new bikini and she said yes your bikini and anything else you want

So yesterday afternoon we bought the bikini and early this morning Lib went into the kitchen and fixed up the picnic fried chicken and orange salad and chocolate cake and the special doughnuts she makes for company she said Karen are you sure it's all the way you want it and I said sure everything looks just great and I won't be so scared of the waves now I have my bikini and Libby laughed she put the lunch basket into the car she has strong brown arms she said no I guess you won't

Then I went up to my room and put on my bikini it fitted just right I went to look in the glass I looked and looked then I clasped my hands in front I felt kind of funny I said slow and clear goodbye Karen goodbye Karen goodbye goodbye

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a *NEW* short story by

BRIAN GARFIELD

Charlie Dark, the old, fat, and conceited gourmand of a counter-espionage agent, is given the most difficult assignment of his dangerous business—an "impossible job": to get a mass-murderer out of East Berlin alive, and not lose his own egotistical skin in the process. If Charlie said so himself, the scheme he evolved was one of the cleverest of his long, devious, and successful career . . .

CHECKPOINT CHARLIE

by BRIAN GARFIELD

I always mistrust Rice but never more so than on those occasions when he pulls me off a job that's only half done and drags me back all the way from Beirut or Helsinki or Sydney to hand me a new assignment. Usually it means he's at his wits' end and needs me to bail him out.

This time it was a short trip back to Langley. I'd been in Montreal and consequently managed to arrive at Rice's lair without the usual jet lag; my only complaint was hunger—there'd been nothing but a light snack on the plane.

It was two in the morning but Rice keeps odd hours and I knew he'd still be in his fourth-floor office. I trampled the U.S. Government Seal into the tiles and the security guard ran my card through the scanner and admitted me to the elevator. The fourth-floor hall rang with my footsteps—eerie, hollow like my innards: I was short-tempered with hunger.

"You're even fatter," Rice greeted me. "I didn't believe it was possible. Where do you buy those suits, Charlie, a tent shop?"

I hate him too.

I sat down. "It's late, you're rude, and I'm hungry. Can we get

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down to it without half an hour of the usual sparring?"

"I guess we'd better."

I was astonished. "It's serious then."

"Desperate, actually. You've been following the Quito hijack?"

"Just the headlines."

"We're in a bind."

I smiled and he scowled at my smile. "Stop leering at me. One of these days—"

"One of these days you'll ask me to do one of your impossible jobs and I'll refuse. And you'll get fired," I said. "Until then you need me, so I'll leer if I feel like it."

"I need you no more than you need me, Charlie. How long can you survive without my protection? If I stop making excuses for you upstairs it'll take the computer lads about seventeen seconds to program you into inglorious retirement. You're eight years and a hundred and umpteen pounds past retirement standards for field-duty executives. Now let's have no more let-me-do-you-a-favor nonsense, all right?"

The one thing he never admits is the key to the whole matter—the reason why he needs me. It's simple. I'm the best he's got, the best there is, and I'm the only capable executive in the company who'll work for Rice.

Old, fat, and conceited—he hates me for all three reasons. But above all I'm the best.

The kids with computer print-outs and space-age gadgets and martial-arts black belts can't keep up with fat old Charlie Dark when the job calls for guts and wits. The blood line has thinned; they don't make them like me any more. Rice never admits this to my face but he knows it.

I, on the other hand, am candid enough to admit my side of the bargain. I loathe Rice but I'd rather work for him than go into an old folks' home and those are the alternatives.

I said, "What about the hijacking?"

Rice's smile displays a keyboard of teeth reminiscent of an alligator. He rarely employs it to indicate amusement; he uses it mainly when he is anticipating the acute discomfort of someone other than himself.

For a while he smiled without speaking. Then, after he felt he'd struck terror deep into my heart, he spoke.

"The hijackers have nearly one hundred hostages, a Boeing Seven-twenty-seven, and a variety of explosives and small arms.

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They have a number of ransom demands as well. They've communicated the demands to the world via the plane's radio equipment."

"Does anybody know where they are yet?"

"Sure. We've known their location from the beginning. Radio triangulation, radar, so forth. It's a field the Ecuadorians built a few years ago to give their air force a base against the Tuparamos guerrillas. It's been in disuse since March of last year but the runway was sufficient for the Seven-twenty-seven, which is a relatively short-roll aircraft. They couldn't have done it with a jumbo. But they seem to know what they're doing; undoubtedly they took all these factors into account. We're not dealing with idiots."

"Access by road?"

"Forget it, Charlie. It's not an Entebbe situation. We can't go in after them. Our hands are tied."

"Why?"

"International politics. Organization of American States et cetera. Just take my word for it."

"Then what's the scam?"

"The hijackers have demanded the release of seventeen so-called political prisoners who are incarcerated in various countries on charges of terrorism, murder, espionage, so forth. What the liberation people think of as victims of political persecution. Actually most of them are vermin, guilty of the vilest crimes."

"Plus they're doubtless asking for a few million dollars and a free ride to Libya or Uganda."

"Yes, of course. Disregard all that, Charlie. The problem is something altogether different."

"Then why bore me with inessentials?"

"Bear with me. Twelve of the seventeen so-called political prisoners are Ché guerrillas who're incarcerated in various South American jails. Four in Ecuador, seven in Bolivia, one in Venezuela. Four more are in prison in Mexico."

"That adds up to sixteen. Where's the seventeenth?"

"Here. Leavenworth."

"Who is he?"

"Emil Stossel." And he grinned at me. Because I was the one who'd put Stossel in prison.

I didn't give him the satisfaction of rising to the bait; I merely said, "So?"

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"So the Latin Americans have elected to accede to the terrorists' demands temporarily, figuring to nail them after the hostages have been freed. The plane has several high-ranking Latin American dignitaries on board. The OAS doesn't want to risk their lives any more than it has to."

I snorted. "They're already at risk."

"It's not for us to decide. The various governments have agreed to turn the sixteen guerrillas loose and give them safe passage to Havana. They're asking us to cooperate by handing Stossel over to the East Germans in Berlin."

"Why not Havana? It's closer."

"He's not Cuban. The Cubans would have little reason to grant him asylum—he'd be an embarrassment to them. He's German. Anyhow that's the demand and we've got to live with it." Rice glanced at the clock above the official photograph of the President. "In two hours we're putting him on a plane in Kansas. It will connect with an international flight at Dulles. He'll be in Berlin tomorrow night."

Then Rice made a face. "It's asinine, I agree—you don't make deals with terrorists. These governments are fools. But we've got no choice. If we held out—refused to release Stossel—you can imagine the black eye we'd get if the hijackers started murdering hostages one at a time."

"All right," I said. "We've got our national tail in a crack. We have to turn him over to the DDR. I don't like turning mass murderers loose any more than you do but I still don't see what it's got to do with me."

Rice smiled again. I fought the impulse to flinch. "How's your broken-field running these days, fat man?"

I saw it coming. His smugness made me gag. He said, "You're going to intercept the pass, Charlie."

"Before or after he crosses the wall?"

"After."

"Lovely."

"We can't recapture him until after the hijack has been dealt with, can we. The hostages have to be turned loose before we can lay a finger on Stossel."

"In other words you want to deliver him to the East Germans and wait for the hijack to end and then afterward you expect me to get him back and put him back in Leavenworth to finish out his sentence."

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"Right. After all, we can't have the world think we've gone soft, can we. We've got to prove they can't get away with it. Carry a big stick and all that."

"We could kill him," I said. "It's a lot easier to assassinate him in East Germany than it is to bring him out alive. No, never mind, don't say it. I know. We won't be stampeded into committing public murder, especially on hostile soil. We have to bring him back alive because that's the best way to rub their noses in it."

"You have the picture, I'm happy to see."

I said, "It's impossible."

"Of course it is. They'll be expecting it. They'll leave no openings at all."

He smiled slowly, deliciously. "Charlie, it's the kind of job you do best. You get bored with anything less."

"Ever since that caper with von Schnee I've been persona non grata in the Eastern sector. If they catch me on their side of the wall they'll lock me up for a hundred and fifty years. In thumbscrews. On German peasant food."

"Yes. I know. Adds a bit of spice to the challenge, doesn't it." And he smiled more broadly than ever.

Emil Stossel had cut his eyeteeth on Abwehr duplicity and he'd run a string of successful agents in the United States for the Eastern bloc intelligence services. The FBI hadn't been able to crack him and I'd been assigned to him about twelve years ago before we all got dumped into a fishbowl where we were no longer permitted to do that sort of thing domestically. It took time and patience but in the end we were ready to go in after him. His HQ was in Arlington not far from the Pentagon—Stossel had nerve and a sense of humor.

The actual bust was an FBI caper and as usual they miffed it. Stossel got away long enough to barricade himself in the nearby high school and before it was finished he'd killed several of his teen-age hostages. It had led to five life sentences, to be served consecutively, and even the Red diplomats had been wise enough not to put up more than token objection.

But Stossel remained one of the cleverest operatives the DDR had ever fielded. He was an embarrassment to them but they wouldn't mind having him back; he could be of use to them: they'd use his skills. He'd soon be directing clandestine opera-

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tions again for them, I had no doubt of it; they'd keep him out of sight but they'd use him and we'd feel the results before long. It was another excellent reason to get him back.

Stossel's callous annihilation of the teen-age innocents in the high school naturally had endeared him to the verminous terrorists who infested the world of "liberation" movements. He was a hero to them; it didn't matter whether he was a professional or an asinine leftist incompetent—it was his brutality that made him a hero to the Quito hijackers. At the same time the East Germans, to whom Stossel was undoubtedly a public embarrassment, could not disown him now without offending their Marxist disciples in Latin America. They would have no choice but to grant him asylum; and once having done so, as I say, they would use him.

Of course that wouldn't do.

I managed to arrive at Templehof ahead of him by arranging for his plane to undergo a refueling delay at Gatwick. It gave me time for a brief meeting at Templehof with an American Air Force colonel (Intelligence) who was dubious about cooperating until I put him on a scrambler line to Washington. The colonel grunted into the phone, stiffened to attention, said, "Yes, sir," and cradled the receiver with awe. Then he gave me the item I'd requested.

I'd had time on the plane, between meals and extra meals, to work out something approximating a plan. It is what distinguishes me from the computer lads: flexibility, preparedness, the ability to improvise quickly and precisely—ingenuity guided by experience. It's why I am the best.

The plan had to account for a number of factors such as, for example, the undesirability of my having to set foot physically on their side of the Wall. Much better if I could pull off the caper with long strings, manipulating my puppets from afar. Also there was the fact that Stossel undoubtedly would have several days' grace inside East Germany before the hijackers released their hostages and the Quito caper came to its conclusion; it would give Stossel time to bury himself far beyond my reach and I had to counter that effect with preparations designed to bring him to the surface at the end of the going-to-ground period.

The scheme was, I must admit, one of the cleverest of my long, devious, and successful career. . .

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I waited for Stossel in a private cubicle at the airport—somebody's office; it was well furnished, the appointments complete right down to a thoroughly stocked bar and an adjoining full bath. Through the double-paned windows I had a soundproofed view of the busy runways.

Two armed plainclothes guards brought him into the room and examined my credentials carefully before they retreated to the far side of the room and left me to talk with him. We spoke in German.

I said, "You remember me."

"Yes. I remember you." He'd had twelve years in prison to think about me and there was a great deal of hate in his voice.

"I was doing my job," I said, "just as you were doing yours." I wanted to soften him up a bit and Stossel's German soul would understand the common concept of duty: he was, above all else, a co-professional. I was leaning on that.

I said, "I've got another job now. My orders are to make sure you get across to your own country in safety. You've still got enemies here."

It made him smile a bit at the irony of it and I was pleased because it was the reaction I needed from him. I went around behind the bar. "A drink? It'll be a little while before our transportation arrives. We want the streets empty when we drive you through West Berlin."

He looked dubious. I poured myself a bourbon and stepped away from the bar. "Help yourself," I said off-handedly, and wandered toward the windows.

A Viscount was landing, with puffs of smoke as the wheels touched. In the reflection of the glass I saw him make his choice. He poured himself two fingers of Polish vodka from a bottle that had a stalk of grass in it; he brought the drink around toward me and I turned to face him. "Prosit." I elevated my glass in toast, and drank. "What's it feel like to be going home?"

"It feels good. Doubly good because it must annoy you so much to watch me walk away." He made an elegant and ironic gesture with the glass and tossed it back Russian style, one gulp, and I watched his eyes close with the pleasure of it—it was the first drink of first-class home-style booze he'd had in a dozen years.

I said, "Did you ever find out what led me to you in Arlington in the first place?"

"Does it matter?"

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"It was a trivial error."

"Humans make them."

"Yes. But I have the feeling you'll make the same mistake again—the same weakness will trip you up next time." I smiled. "In fact, I'm sure of it."

"Would you care to bet on it, Dark?"

"Sure."

"How much, then?"

"Your freedom," I said.

He was amused. "We'll never meet again, unless it's in an East German prison—you inside, me outside."

"I'll take the bet, Stossel." I turned to watch the Viscount taxi toward the terminal. "I'd like you to memorize a telephone number. It's here in the Western sector."

"What for?"

"You may want to get in touch with me." I gave him the number: I repeated it three times and knew he wouldn't forget it—he had an excellent memory for numbers.

He laughed. "I can't conceive of—"

The phone rang, interrupting him. I went to the bar to answer it. Listened, spoke, then turned to Stossel. "The car's here."

"I'm ready."

"Then let's go."

I stood on the safe side of Checkpoint Charlie with my hatbrim down and my collar up against the fine night drizzle and watched the big Opel slide through the barriers. The Wall loomed grotesquely. Stossel emerged from the car at the DDR booth and I saw him shake hands with the raincoated delegation of East German officials. They were minor functionaries, police types, Vopos in the background in their uniforms; near me stood an American TV crew with a portable camera, filming the scene for tomorrow's news.

It was all bleak and foreign-intriguish; I hoped they were using black-and-white. The East Germans bundled Stossel into a dark Zis limousine and when it disappeared I walked back to Davidson's Volkswagen and squeezed into the passenger seat.

Davidson put it in gear. "Where to?"

"Bristol Kempinski."

On the way to the hotel he tried to pump me about my plans. Davidson is chief of the Berlin station; Rice hadn't had any choice

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but to brief him on my mission because there'd have been a flap otherwise—jurisdictional jealousies are rampant in the company and never more ferocious than on the ultra-active stations like Berlin. Rice had been forced to reveal my mission to Davidson, if only to reassure him that I wasn't horning in on any of his own works-in-progress. But he knew none of the tactical details and he was seething to find out.

I had to fend him off without putting his nose too far out of joint. I didn't enjoy it; I'm no good at it—I'm an accomplished liar but that sort of diplomatic deceit is not quite lying and I lack the patience for it. In any case I was tired from the long flight and from the adrenalin that had shot through me during the crucial stage of the set-up. If it had gone wrong at that moment . . . But it hadn't and I was still on course and running.

In the hotel room I ordered a huge dinner sent up. Davidson had eaten earlier but he stubbornly hovered, still prying for information, watching with amazement and ill-concealed disgust while I demolished the enormous meal. He shared the wine with me; it was a fair Moselle.

"What did you want from that Air Force colonel who met you at the airport?"

"Look, Arthur, I don't mean to be obstructionist, I know it's your bailiwick but the details on this operation are classified on a need-to-know basis and if you can get authorization from Langley, then I'll be happy to fill you in on the tedious details. Right now my hands are tied. I ask you to understand and sympathize."

Finally he went away after making it clear he intended to file a complaint. I was relieved to see his back. I tumbled into the luxurious bed and was instantly asleep.

There wasn't much I could do but wait for the phone call. I had to spend the time in the hotel room: some discreet machinations had taken place, through Davidson's offices, to get the private phone line installed on short notice. I might have been in prison for all the freedom of movement I had; it made me think of Stossel with irony. At least I had a comfortable cell; it was why I'd picked the Bristol Kempinski—Old World elegance, hot and cold running everything.

I caught up on reading, watched some soporifically slow German television programs, enticed Davidson and some others into a sixteen-hour poker game that cost them, collectively, some $400, and growled at the phone frequently in an effort to will it to ring.

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The television brought me news of the hijack story in South America. All their other demands having been met, the hijackers forced the aircrew to fly them to Buenos Aires on the first leg of a journey to North Africa. While the plane was refueling at Buenos Aires a gang of Argentinian commandos got aboard in maintenance coveralls, isolated the hijackers neatly, and brought the caper to its end; passengers and crew were released unharmed; two hijackers dead, three wounded and captured. Case closed.

About that time I had a blistering phone call from Rice. "Are you still sitting on your four-acre duff? You're free to go in and get him now."

"I've still got jet lag. Maybe tomorrow."

"Damn you—"

"You want it done properly, don't you?"

"The pressure's on me."

"Live with it." I rang off, amused and pleased. I hadn't revealed my plan to him. Let him stew. I summoned a whopping great lunch from room service.

Between me and Rice lies the unspoken understanding that he has half his hopes pinned on my accomplishing the objective and the other half pinned on my falling flat on my big face. I'm uncertain which of the prospects gives him the greater anticipatory thrill.

By the fourth day Rice's phone calls were nearly apoplectic and I was rested, replete and recumbent. Today would be the most likely day for things to break according to the science of the situation.

Rice was issuing ultimata. "I know you're scared of going over into the Eastern zone. Well, it's just too bad, Charlie. If you're still in that hotel at midnight I'm throwing you to the wolves."

I rang off without replying. I was able to contain my anxiety—if he threw me to the wolves prematurely and then my plan came off successfully, it would make him doubly the fool and he wasn't going to risk that. The threat was empty for the moment. But he might go around the bend at some point, throw self-preservation to the winds in his rage against me. I couldn't do much about that except hope it held off long enough to let things sort themselves out.

The real anxiety had to do with Stossel. Suppose he couldn't get to a phone? If they were still holding him in Debriefing he might not have access to an outside phone. But they'd had him nearly a

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week now; surely they'd have administered pentathol by now and learned he was still loyal to them.

I knew one thing. Rice or no Rice, I wasn't going over that Wall. No one-way trips for old Charlie Dark. However it topped out, this was going to remain a remote-control job. I'd already pulled the strings and there was nothing left now except to wait and hope the puppet danced.

Davidson kept dropping in when he had nothing better to do. He came to me from oblique angles and doubtless thought himself clever. That afternoon he was pumping me slyly about Stossel. "How did you nail him in the first place?"

"The job was to find him—we didn't know where he was holed up. He ran his network through a Byzantine series of cut-outs and blind drops. Nobody had ever been able to trace him back to his lair. We knew he was in the Arlington-Alexandria area but that was the sum of our knowledge. I had to ask myself how somebody might find Charlie Dark if *he* were hiding out, and I answered myself that all you'd have to do would be to find the best Italian food in town and wait for Charlie Dark to show up there.

"It worked the same way with Stossel. Everybody has preferences, colas or a brand of cigarettes or whatever. It takes a lot of manpower to work that kind of lead but we had no choice. We had the dossier on him, we knew his quirks. He's half Polish, you know. Always had a taste for the best Polish vodka—the kind that's sold with a stalk of buffalo grass in the bottle."

"I've tried that stuff. Once. Tastes foul."

"Not to Stossel," I said. "Or a lot of other people. Most fair-sized liquor stores in the States carry the stuff. It took manpower and legwork—that was FBI work, of course. They staked out dozens of stores and in the end it led us to Stossel. He was tripped up by his preference for Polish vodka. I told him it was a weakness that would betray him again."

"Has it?"

I was about to answer him when the phone rang. It galvanized me.

"Herr Dark?"

"Speaking."

"My people—the doctors—they tell me there is no antidote."

"They're wrong," I told him. "We've developed one."

"I see." There was no emotion in Stossel's voice.

"West side, Checkpoint Charlie," I said, "any time you're ready.

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We'll be waiting. Come alone, of course." I smiled when I cradled the phone.

The smile wasn't for Stossel; it was for Rice.

Stossel came out at 11:40 that night. It was twenty minutes short of the deadline Rice had given me. There was a satisfying symmetry in that.

Davidson put the handcuffs on him. Stossel was stoic. "How long do I have?"

"You'll be all right now." We rode toward the airport with Stossel squeezed between us in the Opel's back seat. It was safe to tell him now. I said, "It's a benign poison. It has all the attributes and early symptoms of Luminous Poisoning but actually it's the reverse."

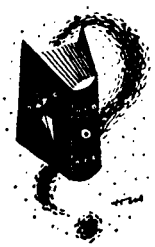
"Our doctors told me it was incurable. I had terrible cramps."

"I didn't give you the poison, Stossel. I gave you the antidote. Like a serum. It contains similar properties."

"You bluffed me." He brooded on his handcuffs. "Of course it was in the vodka."

"Where else? I told you the weakness would trip you up."

When I boarded the plane with Stossel I was savagely happy anticipating Rice's rage. On the ten-hour flight I ate five dinners.



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DEPARTMENT OF SECOND STORIES

H. Edward Hunsburger's first story appeared in 1976 in "Mystery Monthly." His second story introduces Adrian Nile, the long-time owner of The Source Pipe Shop, an appealing vocation for an amateur detective. In Adrian Nile's bow in the pages of EQMM he tackles the puzzle of "things that should be there and aren't" . . .

THE PUZZLE OF THE TEMPORARY THEFTS

by H. EDWARD HUNSBURGER

"You haven't been adding anything new to your Baker Street Blend, have you, Adrian?" Professor Baxter shifted his bulldog pipe to the opposite corner of his mouth. "Nothing exotic or—er—slightly illegal?" he continued.

Adrian Nile smiled and shook his head. "It's still the same combination of Burley, Virginias, and Latakia that I've mixed for more years than I care to mention." He lifted his hands from the big wooden bowl and brushed off the clinging shreds of tobacco. "What's it doing? Making you see things that aren't there?"

"More in the nature of things that should be there and aren't, until later when they are." Baxter's long face began to redden. "I know it's not the tobacco. But since I don't know any sympathetic bartender I decided to bring my problem to my favorite tobacconist."

Nile selected a Canadian from the long rack behind the blending bar and began to load it. Since he had opened The Source Pipe Shop 30 years ago, Nile had solved quite a few interesting puzzles. "I'm flattered but I'm not sure how much I can help you." He lit up with a wooden match. "Tell me about it."

"Well, you know that I have a large collection of books dealing with the early history of New York. It's been a hobby with me ever since I came to teach here ten years ago. Most of the books

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are from the last century and although they are not rare and valuable they are certainly important to *me*. The fact of the matter is that someone has been borrowing them without my permission."

The professor puffed angrily on his pipe. "But that's not the strange part. Whoever is borrowing the books does so for one night only and the books are not closely related. One night a ship's log was missing, on another it was a social register, and before that a cookbook published in 1887. I just can't make any sense out of it."

"Each book is returned unharmed after one day's absence?"

"Correct. One book comes back and another one's gone. I've checked each one thoroughly and all the pages are there and the book's in good condition. It's starting to drive me crazy."

"Quite a puzzle," Nile admitted.

"Do you like a good brandy?" The tobacconist nodded assent. "Well, come over to my place this evening around eight. Over a glass and a couple of pipefuls you can survey the scene of the crime."

Professor Baxter lived in a brownstone roominghouse in the West Twenties. He answered the downstairs door himself and ushered Nile into a clean but rather threadbare foyer. "There was another book missing when I got home this evening and last night's book was back in place," he whispered.

Nile followed him up two broad flights of stairs. "There are only three other roomers here besides myself," Baxter explained as he unlocked his door. "A painter who lives across the hall, a retired architect below me, and a publisher's reader next door to him. Mrs. Rowan who owns the house has the ground floor to herself."

The room was surprisingly attractive. It had high ceilings and a bay window overlooking a garden. But the main feature was a solid wall of books—a thousand or more on floor-to-ceiling shelves. Nile sat in a comfortable armchair while the professor poured brandy into two large snifters.

When they were both seated with their pipes going, Nile asked an obvious question. "You've got so many books, how did you even notice that one was missing?"

"I think my mysterious borrower would also be surprised. It was really quite by chance that I caught on to this game myself. Last week I had need of a particular book and when I went to the shelf I found it wasn't there. I may not be a great scholar but I am an orderly one. When I use a book I always put it back in the

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same place. I was sure it was stolen until I saw it back in its proper place the next day and found another book missing."

Nile peered into his brandy snifter like a storefront gypsy consulting her crystal ball. "Tell me more about your neighbors. Since the Why of the matter is rather elusive, perhaps we'd get further by figuring out the Who. The obvious suspect would be someone here in the house."

"I agree but I can't understand why anyone would want the books. Mrs. Rowan is far too honest to take them without asking and besides her main reading matter is romance magazines. Mr. Melvore, the retired architect, is an invalid who rarely leaves his room. As for Sellman, the publisher's reader, the last thing I could imagine him stealing would be a book. He has access to all the books he could possibly want—at work or at the public library. Mr. de Haven, across from me, is the newest tenant—he's been here about four months and keeps odd hours. But as a painter, I suppose he can only work when the light is good."

The professor turned his head as he heard a door close. "That's de Haven now. He usually goes out about this time in the evening." Both men listened to the diminishing sound of footsteps on the stairs.

Nile set down his empty glass. "Your nearest neighbor seems the most likely suspect. I suggest we take advantage of his absence to examine his room." As the professor began to protest Nile held up his hand. "If we don't find anything incriminating, then he's in the clear. We have to start somewhere."

Carrying a flashlight Nile crossed the hall, with the professor reluctantly in tow. The door, like all the others in the house, was without a lock. Nile eased it open and the two men stepped into the darkness. The tobacconist snapped on the flashlight and slowly directed the beam around the room. The walls were covered with paintings. They were done in many different styles and techniques but they all had one thing in common: they were all unfinished. The light swept over a desk with a reading lamp. Nile walked over and turned the lamp on.

For the first time the two men viewed the room as a whole. Except for a small corner near the window with an easel and a work table, the room was a mess. The bed was unmade and clothing lay in heaps on the floor. A mound of empty bottles and food containers was piled up near the door.

"A man in pursuit of a single passion," the professor observed.

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"Yet none of the paintings is complete. There can't be much satisfaction in that." Nile relit his pipe, waited for the match to cool, then dropped it into his jacket pocket. Something caught his eye. "This wouldn't be yours," he said as he drew a slim leather-covered book from a stack of papers.

"My *Compton's Guide to Bowery Night Life*," the professor said with excitement. He began carefully to examine the book page by page.

Idly Nile picked up a stack of drawings from the desk. As he leafed through them his eyes began to widen. He was holding a small but valuable collection of master drawings. There were three by Daumier, one by Whistler, and six by Matisse. The subject matter and the line quality were unmistakable, and the paper seemed quite old.

Suddenly Nile fitted the pieces of the puzzle into place.

"The book is undamaged," the professor said as he slipped it under his arm.

"Mind if I have a look at it?"

The professor handed it to Nile who opened it beneath the reading lamp. After studying the book for a few moments he turned to the professor and smiled. "All the pages are there and yet all are not there."

He held the book open at the title page and with his finger indicated a tiny edge that remained from where the preceding page had been razored out.

"But that was just a flyleaf—nothing but blank paper."

"Exactly," Nile said with a hint of triumph in his voice. "Blank paper manufactured in the Nineteenth Century—just the kind required to forge a drawing by one of the masters of that period. Someone like Whistler." Nile pointed to the drawing at the top of the pile.

"Barbarians!"

Both men turned at the sound of the voice. A small gray-haired man was doing what could only be described as a dance of agitation in the open doorway. His eyes darted from the intruders to the desk and finally to the open book in Nile's hand. He knew he had been discovered. As Nile began to advance on him he shook a parting fist in the air and ran down the stairs. Moments later the street door slammed.

Neither man made a move to pursue him. They stood looking at each other for a moment before both men burst out laughing . . .

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Two weeks passed before Professor Baxter visited The Source Pipe Shop again. He found Nile having a quiet smoke in the rear.

"Well, they found de Haven," the professor said, setting down his briefcase. "A gallery owner in Boston called the police after de Haven tried to sell him an unauthenticated Juan Gris drawing. It turned out the owner was one of the leading authorities on Gris in this country."

"You can't help but feel sorry for de Haven. The man obviously has considerable talent."

"I know. I found out a little of his background. He was a brilliant but erratic student at the Ecole de Paris. He was a master technician but he never found a style he was comfortable in. He began forging over twenty years ago and has fooled some of the finest experts in the field. He's quite well-known in Europe. Made and lost a fortune several times over."

Nile continued to puff reflectively at the ceiling.

"In lieu of back rent," the professor continued, "Mrs. Rowan fell heir to everything he left at the house." The professor bent down and opened his briefcase. "Well, almost everything. I thought you might like this for your shop."

He handed Nile a small framed drawing. It was a Daumier sketch by de Haven of a French workman smoking a stubby clay pipe. It was a precise, beautifully executed scene from another age. Nile looked up from the drawing to scrutinize the professor with mock amazement.

"After all," Baxter said, reddening, "it was *my* paper."

"Q"

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DISCOVERY

an "unknown" detective story by

P. G. WODEHOUSE

In November 1976, the Seabury Press of New York published a book titled THE UNCOLLECTED WODEHOUSE, *edited by David A. Jasen. The volume includes a previously "unknown" locked-room detective story by the one and only P. G. Wodehouse. About the story Mr. Jasen wrote: "This is a real find for the collector—an honest-to-goodness mystery story. The story was originally entitled 'The Education of Detective Oakes'."*

The only previous publication of the story, before it was retitled, was in the December 1914 issue of "Pearson's" magazine, in England—almost 64 years ago!

Now, what should you expect of a writer who published his first novel in 1906 and for the next 71 years "created a literary world that is unique"? The world of Jeeves, Mulliner, Ukridge, Psmith, Bertie Wooster, and all the other unforgettable names and characters. Well, this early Wodehouse mystery will remind you of a famous Sherlock Holmes short story, but it offers a more satisfying solution (sacrilege!) to the locked-room puzzle. The story is not written in the now familiar typical-Wodehouse style—not comic, ripe, wacky, colloquial. Rather, it is in the young Wodehouse style—simple, clear, direct—and as easy to read as pure Wodehouse at his mellifluous best . . .

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DEATH AT THE EXCELSIOR

by P. G. WODEHOUSE

The room was the typical bedroom of the typical boarding-house, furnished, insofar as it could be said to be furnished at all, with a severe simplicity. It contained two beds, a pine chest of drawers, a strip of faded carpet, and a wash basin. But there was that on the floor which set this room apart from a thousand rooms of the same kind. Flat on his back, with his hands tightly clenched and one leg twisted oddly under him and with his teeth gleaming through his gray beard in a horrible grin, Captain John Gunner stared up at the ceiling with eyes that saw nothing.

Until a moment before, he had had the little room all to himself. But now two people were standing just inside the door, looking down at him. One was a large policeman, who twisted his helmet nervously in his hands. The other was a tall gaunt old woman in a rusty black dress, who gazed with pale eyes at the dead man. Her face was quite expressionless.

The woman was Mrs. Pickett, owner of the Excelsior boarding-house. The policeman's name was Grogan. He was a genial giant, a terror to the riotous element of the waterfront, but obviously ill at ease in the presence of death. He drew in his breath, wiped his forehead, and whispered, "Look at his eyes, ma'am!"

Mrs. Pickett had not spoken a word since she had brought the policeman into the room, and she did not do so now. Constable Grogan looked at her quickly. He was afraid of Mother Pickett, as was everybody else along the waterfront. Her silence, her pale eyes, and the quiet decisiveness of her personality cowed even the tough old salts who patronized the Excelsior. She was a formidable influence in that little community of sailormen.

"That's just how I found him," said Mrs. Pickett. She did not speak loudly, but her voice made the policeman start.

He wiped his forehead again. "It might have been apoplexy," he hazarded.

Mrs. Pickett said nothing. There was a sound of footsteps outside, and a young man entered, carrying a black bag.

"Good morning, Mrs. Pickett. I was told that—good Lord!" The young doctor dropped to his knees beside the body and raised one

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of the arms. After a moment he lowered it gently to the floor and shook his head in grim resignation.

"He's been dead for hours," he announced. "When did you find him?"

"Twenty minutes back," replied the old woman. "I guess he died last night. He never would be called in the morning. Said he liked to sleep on. Well, he's got his wish."

"What did he die of, sir?" asked the policeman.

"It's impossible to say without an examination," the doctor answered. "It looks like a stroke, but I'm pretty sure it isn't. It might be a coronary attack, but I happen to know his blood pressure was normal, and his heart sound. He called in to see me only a week ago and I examined him thoroughly. But sometimes you can be deceived. The inquest will tell us."

He eyed the body almost resentfully. "I can't understand it. The man had no right to drop dead like this. He was a tough old sailor who ought to have been good for another twenty years. If you want my honest opinion—though I can't possibly be certain until after the inquest—I should say he had been poisoned."

"How would he be poisoned?" asked Mrs. Pickett quietly.

"That's more than I can tell you. There's no glass about that he could have drunk it from. He might have got it in capsule form. But why should he have done it? He was always a pretty cheerful sort of man, wasn't he?"

"Yes, sir," said the constable. "He had the name of being a joker in these parts. Kind of sarcastic, they tell me, though he never tried it on me."

"He must have died quite early last night," said the doctor. He turned to Mrs. Pickett. "What's become of Captain Muller? If he shares this room he ought to be able to tell us something."

"Captain Muller spent the night with some friends at Portsmouth," said Mrs. Pickett. "He left right after supper, and hasn't returned."

The doctor stared thoughtfully about the room, frowning.

"I don't like it. I can't understand it. If this had happened in India I should have said the man had died from some form of snake bite. I was out there two years, and I've seen a hundred cases of it. The poor devils all looked just like this. But the thing's ridiculous. How could a man be bitten by a snake in a Southampton waterfront boardinghouse? Was the door locked when you found him, Mrs. Pickett?"

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Mrs. Pickett nodded. "I opened it with my own key. I had been calling to him and he didn't answer, so I guessed something was wrong."

The constable spoke, "You ain't touched anything, ma'am? They're always very particular about that. If the doctor's right and there's been anything up, that's the first thing they'll ask."

"Everything's just as I found it."

"What's that on the floor beside him?" the doctor asked.

"Only his harmonica. He liked to play it of an evening in his room. I've had some complaints about it from some of the gentlemen, but I never saw any harm, so long as he didn't play it too late."

"Seems as if he was playing it when—it happened," Constable Grogan said. "That don't look much like suicide, sir."

"I didn't say it was suicide."

Grogan whistled. "You don't think—"

"I'm not thinking anything—until after the inquest. All I say is that it's queer."

Another aspect of the matter seemed to strike the policeman. "I guess this ain't going to do the Excelsior any good, ma'am," he said sympathetically.

Mrs. Pickett shrugged.

"I suppose I had better go and notify the coroner," said the doctor.

He went out, and after a momentary pause the policeman followed. Constable Grogan was not greatly troubled with nerves, but he felt a decided desire to be where he could not see the dead man's staring eyes.

Mrs. Pickett remained where she was, looking down at the still form on the floor. Her face was expressionless, but inwardly she was tormented and alarmed. It was the first time such a thing as this had happened at the Excelsior, and, as Constable Grogan had suggested, it was not likely to increase the attractiveness of the house in the eyes of possible boarders. It was not the threatened pecuniary loss which was troubling her. As far as money was concerned, she could have lived comfortably on her savings, for she was richer than most of her friends supposed. It was the blot on the escutcheon of the Excelsior, the stain on its reputation, which was tormenting her.

The Excelsior was her life. Starting many years before, beyond the memory of the oldest boarder, she had built up a model estab-

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lishment. Men spoke of it as a place where you were fed well, cleanly housed, and where petty robbery was unknown.

Such was the chorus of praise that it is not likely that much harm could come to the Excelsior from a single mysterious death, but Mother Pickett was not consoling herself with that.

She looked at the dead man with pale grim eyes. Out in the hallway the doctor's voice further increased her despair. He was talking to the police on the telephone, and she could distinctly hear his every word.

The offices of Mr. Paul Snyder's Detective Agency in New Oxford Street had grown in the course of a dozen years from a single room to an impressive suite bright with polished wood, clicking typewriters, and other evidences of success. Where once Mr. Snyder had sat and waited for clients and attended to them himself, he now sat in his private office and directed eight assistants.

He had just accepted a case—a case that might be nothing at all or something exceedingly big. It was on the latter possibility that he had gambled. The fee offered was, judged by his present standards of prosperity, small. But the bizarre facts, coupled with something in the personality of the client, had won him over. He briskly touched the bell and requested that Mr. Oakes should be sent in to him.

Elliott Oakes was a young man who both amused and interested Mr. Snyder, for though he had only recently joined the staff, he made no secret of his intention of revolutionizing the methods of the agency. Mr. Snyder himself, in common with most of his assistants, relied for results on hard work and common sense. He had never been a detective of the showy type. Results had justified his methods, but he was perfectly aware that young Mr. Oakes looked on him as a dull old man who had been miraculously favored by luck.

Mr. Snyder had selected Oakes for the case in hand principally because it was one where inexperience could do no harm, and where the brilliant guesswork which Oakes preferred to call his inductive reasoning might achieve an unexpected success.

Another motive actuated Mr. Snyder. He had a strong suspicion that the conduct of this case was going to have the beneficial result of lowering Oakes's self-esteem. If failure achieved this end, Mr. Snyder felt that failure, though it would not help the agency, would not be an unmixed ill.

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The door opened and Oakes entered tensely. He did everything tensely, partly from a natural nervous energy, and partly as a pose. He was a lean young man, with dark eyes and a thin-lipped mouth, and he looked quite as much like a typical detective as Mr. Snyder looked like a comfortable and prosperous stockbroker.

"Sit down, Oakes," said Mr. Snyder. "I've got a job for you."

Oakes sank into a chair like a crouching leopard and placed the tips of his fingers together. He nodded curtly. It was part of his pose to be keen and silent.

"I want you to go to this address"—Mr. Snyder handed him an envelope—"and look around. The address is of a sailors' boarding-house down in Southampton. You know the sort of place—retired sea captains and so on live there. All most respectable. In all its history nothing more sensational has ever happened than a case of suspected cheating at halfpenny nap. Well, a man has died there."

"Murdered?" Oakes asked.

"I don't know. That's for you to find out. The coroner left it open. 'Death by Misadventure' was the verdict, and I don't blame him. I don't see how it could have been murder. The door was locked on the inside, so nobody could have got in."

"The window?"

"The window was open, granted. But the room is on the second floor. Anyway, you may dismiss the window. I remember the old lady saying there were bars across it, and that nobody could have squeezed through."

Oakes's eyes glistened. "What was the cause of death?" he asked.

Mr. Snyder coughed. "Snake bite," he said.

Oakes's careful calm deserted him. He uttered a cry of astonishment. "Why, that's incredible!"

"It's the literal truth. The medical examination proved that the fellow had been killed by snake poison—cobra, to be exact, which is found principally in India."

"Cobra!"

"Just so. In a Southampton boardinghouse, in a room with a door locked on the inside, this man was stung by a cobra. To add a little mystification to the limpid simplicity of the affair, when the door was opened there was no sign of any cobra. It couldn't have got out through the door, because the door was locked. It couldn't have got out of the window, because the window was too

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high up, and snakes can't jump. And it couldn't have got up the chimney, because there was no chimney. So there you have it."

He looked at Oakes with a certain quiet satisfaction. It had come to his ears that Oakes had been heard to complain of the infantile nature of the last two cases to which he had been assigned. He had even said that he hoped some day to be given a problem which should be beyond the reasoning powers of a child of six. It seemed to Mr. Snyder that Oakes was about to get his wish.

"I should like further details," said Oakes, a little breathlessly.

"You had better apply to Mrs. Pickett, who owns the boarding-house," Mr. Snyder said. "It was she who put the case in my hands. She is convinced that it is murder. But if we exclude ghosts, I don't see how any third party could have taken a hand in the thing at all. However, she wanted a man from this agency, and was prepared to pay for him, so I promised her I would send one. It is not our policy to turn business away."

He smiled wryly. "In pursuance of that policy I want you to go and put up at Mrs. Pickett's boardinghouse and do your best to enhance the reputation of our agency. I would suggest that you pose as a ship's chandler or something of that sort. You will have to be something maritime or they'll be suspicious of you. And if your visit produces no other results, it will, at least, enable you to make the acquaintance of a very remarkable woman. I commend Mrs. Pickett to your notice. By the way, she says she will help you in your investigations."

Oakes laughed shortly. The idea amused him.

"It's a mistake to scoff at amateur assistance, my boy," said Mr. Snyder in the benevolently paternal manner which had made a score of criminals refuse to believe him a detective *until* the moment when the handcuffs snapped on their wrists. "Crime investigation isn't an exact science. Success or failure depends in a large measure on applied common sense and the possession of a great deal of special information. Mrs. Pickett knows certain things which neither you nor I know, and it's just possible that she may have some stray piece of information which will provide the key to the entire mystery."

Oakes laughed again. "It is very kind of Mrs. Pickett," he said, "but I prefer to trust to my own methods." Oakes rose, his face purposeful. "I'd better be starting at once," he said. "I'll send you reports from time to time."

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"Good. The more detailed the better," said Mr. Snyder genially. "I hope your visit to the Excelsior will be pleasant. And cultivate Mrs. Pickett. She's worthwhile."

The door closed, and Mr. Snyder lighted a fresh cigar. Dashed young fool, he thought and turned his mind to other matters.

A day later Mr. Snyder sat in his office reading a typewritten report. It appeared to be of a humorous nature, for, as he read, chuckles escaped him. Finishing the last sheet he threw his head back and laughed heartily. The manuscript had not been intended by its author for a humorous effect. What Mr. Snyder had been reading was the first of Elliott Oakes' reports from the Excelsior. It read as follows:

"I am sorry to be unable to report any real progress. I have formed several theories which I will put forward later, but at present I cannot say that I am hopeful.

"Directly I arrived I sought out Mrs. Pickett, explained who I was, and requested her to furnish me with any further information which might be of service to me. She is a strange silent woman, who impressed me as having very little intelligence. Your suggestion that I should avail myself of her assistance seems more curious than ever, now that I have seen her.

"The whole affair seems to me at the moment of writing quite inexplicable. Assuming that this Captain Gunner was murdered, there appears to have been no motive for the crime whatsoever. I have made careful inquiries about him, and find that he was a man of 55; had spent nearly 40 years of his life at sea, the last dozen in command of his own ship; was of a somewhat overbearing disposition, though with a fund of rough humour; he had travelled all over the world, and had been a resident of the Excelsior for about ten months. He had a small annuity, and no other money at all, which disposes of money as the motive for the crime.

"In my character of James Burton, a retired ship's chandler, I have mixed with the other boarders, and have heard all they have to say about the affair. I gather that the deceased was by no means popular. He appears to have had a bitter tongue, and I have not met one man who seems to regret his death. On the other hand, I have heard nothing which would suggest that he had any active and violent enemies. He was simply the unpopular boarder—there is always one in every boardinghouse—but nothing more.

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"I have seen a good deal of the man who shared his room—another sea captain named Muller. He is a big silent person, and it is not easy to get him to talk. As regards the death of Captain Gunner he can tell me nothing. It seems that on the night of the tragedy he was away at Portsmouth with some friends. All I have got from him is some information as to Captain Gunner's habits, which leads nowhere.

"The dead man seldom drank, except at night when he would take some whisky. His head was not strong, and a little of the spirit was enough to make him semi-intoxicated, when he would be hilarious and often insulting. I gather that Muller found him a difficult roommate, but he is one of those placid persons who can put up with anything. He and Gunner were in the habit of playing draughts together every night in their room, and Gunner had a harmonica which he played frequently. Apparently he was playing it very soon before he died, which is significant, as seeming to dispose of any idea of suicide.

"As I say, I have one or two theories, but they are in a very nebulous state. The most plausible is that on one of his visits to India—I have ascertained that he made several voyages there—Captain Gunner may in some way have fallen foul of the natives. The fact that he certainly died of the poison of an Indian snake supports this theory. I am making inquiries as to the movements of several Indian sailors who were here in their ships at the time of the tragedy.

"I have another theory. Does Mrs. Pickett know more about this affair than she appears to? I may be wrong in my estimate of her mental qualities. Her apparent stupidity may be cunning. But here again, the absence of motive brings me up against a dead wall. I must confess that at present I do not see my way clearly. However, I will write again shortly."

Mr. Snyder derived the utmost enjoyment from the report. He liked the substance of it, and above all, he was tickled by the bitter tone of frustration which characterized it. Oakes was baffled, and his knowledge of Oakes told him that the sensation of being baffled was gall and wormwood to that high-spirited young man. Whatever might be the result of this investigation, it would teach him the virtue of patience.

He wrote his assistant a short note:

"Dear Oakes,

"Your report received. You certainly seem to have got the hard

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case which, I hear, you were pining for. Don't build too much on plausible motives in a case of this sort. Fauntleroy, the London murderer, killed a woman for no other reason than that she had thick ankles. Many years ago I myself was on a case where a man murdered an intimate friend because of a dispute about a bet. My experience is that five murderers out of ten act on the whim of the moment, without anything which, properly speaking, you could call a motive at all.

Yours very cordially,
Paul Snyder

P.S. I don't think much of your Pickett theory. However, you're in charge. I wish you luck."

Young Mr. Oakes was not enjoying himself. For the first time in his life the self-confidence which characterized all his actions seemed to be failing him. The change had taken place almost overnight. The fact that the case had the appearance of presenting the unusual had merely stimulated him at first. But then doubts had crept in and the problem had begun to appear insoluble.

True, he had only just taken it up, but something told him that, for all the progress he was likely to make, he might just as well have been working on it steadily for a month. He was completely baffled. And every moment which he spent in the Excelsior boardinghouse made it clearer to him that that infernal old woman with the pale eyes thought him an incompetent fool. It was that, more than anything, which made him acutely conscious of his lack of success. His nerves were being sorely troubled by the quiet scorn of Mrs. Pickett's gaze. He began to think that perhaps he had been a shade too self-confident and abrupt in the short interview which he had had with her on his arrival.

As might have been expected, his first act, after his brief interview with Mrs. Pickett, was to examine the room where the tragedy had taken place. The body was gone, but otherwise nothing had been moved.

Oakes belonged to the magnifying-glass school of detection. The first thing he did on entering the room was to make a careful examination of the floor, the walls, the furniture, and the window sill. He would have hotly denied the assertion that he did this because it looked well, but he would have been hard put to it to advance any other reason.

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If he discovered anything, his discoveries were entirely negative and served only to deepen the mystery. As Mr. Snyder had said, there was no chimney, and nobody could have entered through the locked door.

There remained the window. It was small, and apprehensiveness, perhaps, of the possibility of burglars had caused the proprietress to make it doubly secure with two iron bars. No human being could have squeezed his way through.

It was late that night that he wrote and dispatched to headquarters the report which had amused Mr. Snyder.

Two days later Mr. Snyder sat at his desk, staring with wide unbelieving eyes at a telegram he had just received. It read as follows:

HAVE SOLVED GUNNER MYSTERY. RETURNING. OAKES.

Mr. Snyder narrowed his eyes and rang the bell.

"Send Mr. Oakes to me directly he arrives," he said.

He was pained to find that his chief emotion was one of bitter annoyance. The swift solution of such an apparently insoluble problem would reflect the highest credit of the agency, and there were picturesque circumstances connected with the case which would make it popular with the newspapers and lead to its being given a great deal of publicity.

Yet, in spite of all this, Mr. Snyder was annoyed. He realized now how large a part the desire to reduce Oakes's self-esteem had played with him. He further realized, looking at the thing honestly, that he had been firmly convinced that the young man would not come within a mile of a reasonable solution of the mystery. He had desired only that his failure would prove a valuable educational experience for him. For he believed that failure at this particular point in his career would make Oakes a more valuable asset to the agency.

But now here Oakes was, within a ridiculously short space of time, returning to the fold, not humble and defeated, but triumphant. Mr. Snyder looked forward with apprehension to the young man's probable demeanor under the intoxicating influence of victory.

His apprehensions were well grounded. He had barely finished the third of the series of cigars which, like milestones, marked the progress of his afternoon, when the door opened and young Oakes entered. Mr. Snyder could not repress a faint moan at the sight of

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him. One glance was enough to tell him that his worst fears were realized.

"I got your telegram," said Mr. Snyder.

Oakes nodded. "It surprised you, eh?" he asked.

Mr. Snyder resented the patronizing tone of the question, but he had resigned himself to be patronized, and keep his anger in check.

"Yes," he replied, "I must say it did surprise me. I didn't gather from your report that you had even found a clue. Was it the Indian theory that turned the trick?"

Oakes laughed tolerantly. "Oh, I never really believed that preposterous theory for one moment. I just put it in to round out my report. I hadn't begun to think about the case then—not really think."

Mr. Snyder, nearly exploding with wrath, extended his cigar case. "Light up and tell me all about it," he said, controlling his anger.

"Well, I won't say I haven't earned this," said Oakes, puffing away. He let the ash of his cigar fall delicately to the floor—another action which seemed significant to his employer. As a rule his assistants, unless particularly pleased with themselves, used the ashtray.

"My first act on arriving," Oakes said, "was to have a talk with Mrs. Pickett. A very dull old woman."

"Curious. She struck me as rather intelligent."

"Not on your life. She gave me no assistance whatever. I then examined the room where the death had taken place. It was exactly as you described it. There was no chimney, the door had been locked on the inside, and the one window was too high up. At first sight it looked extremely unpromising. Then I had a chat with some of the other boarders. They had nothing of any importance to contribute. Most of them simply gibbered. I then gave up trying to get help from the outside and resolved to rely on my own intelligence."

He smiled triumphantly. "It is a theory of mine, Mr. Snyder, which I have found valuable that, in nine cases out of ten, remarkable things don't happen."

"I don't quite follow you there," Mr. Snyder interrupted.

"I will put it another way, if you like. What I mean is that the simplest explanation is nearly always the right one. Consider this case. It seemed impossible that there should have been any

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reasonable explanation of the man's death. Most men would have worn themselves out guessing at wild theories. If I had started to do that, I should have been guessing now. As it is—here I am. I trusted to my belief that nothing remarkable ever happens, and I won out."

Mr. Snyder sighed softly. Oakes was entitled to a certain amount of gloating, but there could be no doubt that his way of telling a story was downright infuriating.

"I believe in the logical sequence of events. I refuse to accept effects unless they are preceded by causes. In other words, with all due respect to your possibly contrary opinions, Mr. Snyder, I simply decline to believe in a murder unless there was a motive for it. The first thing I set myself to ascertain was—what was the motive for the murder of Captain Gunner? And after thinking it over and making every possible inquiry, I decided that there was no motive. Therefore, there was no murder."

Mr. Snyder's mouth opened, and he obviously was about to protest. But he appeared to think better of it and Oakes proceeded: "I then tested the suicide theory. What motive was there for suicide? There was no motive. Therefore, there was no suicide."

This time Mr. Snyder spoke. "You haven't been spending the last few days in the wrong house by any chance, have you? You will be telling me next that there wasn't any dead man."

Oakes smiled. "Not at all. Captain John Gunner was dead, all right. As the medical evidence proved, he died of the bite of a cobra. It was a small cobra which came from Java."

Mr. Snyder stared at him. "How do you know?"

"I do know, beyond any possibility of doubt."

"Did you see the snake?"

Oakes shook his head.

"Then, how in heaven's name—"

"I have enough evidence to make a jury convict Mr. Snake without leaving the box."

"Then suppose you tell me this. How did your cobra from Java get out of the room?"

"By the window," replied Oakes impassively.

"How can you possibly explain that? You say yourself that the window was too high up."

"Nevertheless, it got out by the window. The logical sequence of events is proof enough that it was in the room. It killed Captain Gunner there and left traces of its presence outside. Therefore, as

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the window was the only exit, it must have escaped by that route. Somehow it got out of that window."

"What do you mean—it left traces of its presence outside?"

"It killed a dog in the back yard behind the house," Oakes said. "The window of Captain Gunner's room projects out over it. It is full of boxes and litter and there are a few stunted shrubs scattered about. In fact, there is enough cover to hide any small object like the body of a dog. That's why it was not discovered at first. The maid at the Excelsior came on it the morning after I sent you my report while she was emptying a box of ashes in the yard. It was just an ordinary stray dog without collar or license. The analyst examined the body and found that the dog had died of the bite of a cobra."

"But you didn't find the snake?"

"No. We cleaned out that yard till you could have eaten your breakfast there, but the snake had gone. It must have escaped through the door of the yard, which was standing ajar. That was a couple of days ago, and there has been no further tragedy. In all likelihood it is dead. The nights are pretty cold now, and it would probably have died of exposure."

"But I just don't understand how a cobra got to Southampton," said the amazed Mr. Snyder.

"Can't you guess it? I told you it came from Java."

"How did you know it did?"

"Captain Muller told me. Not directly, but I pieced it together from what he said. It seems that an old shipmate of Captain Gunner's was living in Java. They corresponded, and occasionally this man would send the captain a present as a mark of his esteem. The last present he sent was a crate of bananas. Unfortunately, the snake must have got in unnoticed. That's why I told you the cobra was a small one. Well, that's my case against Mr. Snake, and short of catching him with the goods, I don't see how I could have made out a stronger one. Don't you agree?"

It went against the grain for Mr. Snyder to acknowledge defeat, but he was a fair-minded man, and he was forced to admit that Oakes did certainly seem to have solved the impossible.

"I congratulate you, my boy," he said as heartily as he could. "To be completely frank, when you started out, I didn't think you could do it. By the way, I suppose Mrs. Pickett was pleased?"

"If she was, she didn't show it. I'm pretty well convinced she hasn't enough sense to be pleased at anything. However, she has

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invited me to dinner with her tonight. I imagine she'll be as boring as usual, but she made such a point of it, I had to accept."

For some time after Oakes had gone, Mr. Snyder sat smoking and thinking, in embittered meditation. Suddenly there was brought the card of Mrs. Pickett, who would be grateful if he could spare her a few moments. Mr. Snyder was glad to see Mrs. Pickett. He was a student of character, and she had interested him at their first meeting. There was something about her which had seemed to him unique, and he welcomed this second chance of studying her at close range.

She came in and sat down stiffly, balancing herself on the extreme edge of the chair in which a short while before young Oakes had lounged so luxuriously.

"How are you, Mrs. Pickett?" said Mr. Snyder genially. "I'm very glad that you could find time to pay me a visit. Well, so it wasn't murder after all."

"Sir?"

"I've been talking to Mr. Oakes, whom you met as James Burton," said the detective. "He has told me all about it."

"He told *me* all about it," said Mrs. Pickett dryly.

Mr. Snyder looked at her inquiringly. Her manner seemed more suggestive than her words.

"A conceited, headstrong young fool," said Mrs. Pickett.

It was no new picture of his assistant that she had drawn. Mr. Snyder had often drawn it himself, but at the present juncture it surprised him. Oakes, in his hour of triumph. surely did not deserve this sweeping condemnation.

"Did not Mr. Oakes's solution of the mystery satisfy you, Mrs. Pickett?"

"No."

"It struck me as logical and convincing," Mr. Snyder said.

"You may call it all the fancy names you please, Mr. Snyder. But Mr. Oakes's solution was not the right one."

"Have you an alternative to offer?"

Mrs. Pickett tightened her lips.

"If you have, I should like to hear it."

"You will—at the proper time."

"What makes you so certain that Mr. Oakes is wrong?"

"He starts out with an impossible explanation and rests his whole case on it. There couldn't have been a snake in that room

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because it couldn't have gotten out. The window was too high."

"But surely the evidence of the dead dog?"

Mrs. Pickett looked at him as if he had disappointed her. "I had always heard *you* spoken of as a man with common sense, Mr. Snyder."

"I have always tried to use common sense."

"Then why are you trying now to make yourself believe that something happened which could not possibly have happened just because it fits in with something which isn't easy to explain?"

"You mean that there is another explanation of the dead dog?" Mr. Snyder asked.

"Not *another*. What Mr. Oakes takes for granted is not an explanation. But there is a common-sense explanation, and if he had not been so headstrong and conceited he might have found it."

"You speak as if you had found it," said Mr. Snyder.

"I have." Mrs. Pickett leaned forward as she spoke, and stared at him defiantly.

Mr. Snyder started. "*You* have?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"You will know before tomorrow. In the meantime try and think it out for yourself. A successful and prosperous detective agency like yours, Mr. Snyder, ought to do something in return for a fee."

There was something in her manner so reminiscent of the school-teacher reprimanding a recalcitrant pupil that Mr. Snyder's sense of humor came to his rescue. "We do our best, Mrs. Pickett," he said. "But you mustn't forget that we are only human and cannot guarantee results."

Mrs. Pickett did not pursue the subject. Instead, she proceeded to astonish Mr. Snyder by asking him to swear out a warrant for the arrest of a man known to them both on a charge of murder.

Mr. Snyder's breath was not often taken away in his own office. As a rule he received his clients' communications calmly, strange as they often were. But at her words he gasped. The thought crossed his mind that Mrs. Pickett might be mentally unbalanced.

Mrs. Pickett was regarding him with an unfaltering stare. To all outward appearances she was the opposite of unbalanced.

"But you can't swear out a warrant without evidence," he told her.

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"I have evidence," she replied firmly.

"Precisely what kind of evidence?" he demanded.

"If I told you now you would think that I was out of my mind."

"But, Mrs. Pickett, do you realize what you are asking me to do? I cannot make this agency responsible for the arbitrary arrest of a man on the strength of a single individual's suspicions. It might ruin me. At the least it would make me a laughingstock."

"Mr. Snyder, you may use your own judgment whether or not to swear out that warrant. You will listen to what I have to say, and you will see for yourself how the crime was committed. If after that you feel that you cannot make the arrest I will accept your decision. I know who killed Captain Gunner," she said. "I knew it from the beginning. But I had no proof. Now things have come to light and everything is clear."

Against his judgment Mr. Snyder was impressed. This woman had the magnetism which makes for persuasiveness.

"It—it sounds incredible." Even as he spoke, he remembered that it had long been a professional maxim of his that nothing was incredible, and he weakened still further.

"Mr. Snyder, I ask you to swear out that warrant."

The detective gave in. "Very well," he said.

Mrs. Pickett rose. "If you will come and dine at my house tonight I think I can prove to you that it will be needed. Will you come?"

"I'll come," promised Mr. Snyder.

Mr. Snyder arrived at the Excelsior and shortly after he was shown into the little private sitting room where he found Oakes, the third guest of the evening unexpectedly arrived.

Mr. Snyder looked curiously at the newcomer. Captain Muller had a peculiar fascination for him. It was not Mr. Snyder's habit to trust overmuch to appearances. But he could not help admitting that there was something about this man's aspect, something odd—an unnatural aspect of gloom. He bore himself like one carrying a heavy burden. His eyes were dull, his face haggard. The next moment the detective was reproaching himself with allowing his imagination to run away with his calmer judgment.

The door opened and Mrs. Pickett came in. She made no apology for her lateness.

To Mr. Snyder one of the most remarkable points about the dinner was the peculiar metamorphosis of Mrs. Pickett from the

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brooding silent woman he had known to the gracious and considerate hostess.

Oakes appeared also to be overcome with surprise, so much so that he was unable to keep his astonishment to himself. He had come prepared to endure a dull evening absorbed in grim silence, and he found himself instead opposite a bottle of champagne of a brand and year which commanded his utmost respect. What was even more incredible, his hostess had transformed herself into a pleasant old lady whose only aim seemed to be to make him feel at home.

Beside each of the guest's plates was a neat paper parcel. Oakes picked his up, and stared at it in wonderment. "Why, this is more than a party souvenir, Mrs. Pickett," he said. "It's the kind of mechanical marvel I've always wanted to have on my desk."

"I'm glad you like it, Mr. Oakes," Mrs. Pickett said, smiling. "You must not think of me simply as a tired old woman whom age has completely defeated. I am an ambitious hostess. When I give these little parties, I like to make them a success. I want each of you to remember this dinner."

"I'm sure I will."

Mrs. Pickett smiled again. "I think you all will. You, Mr. Snyder." She paused. "And you, Captain Muller."

To Mr. Snyder there was so much meaning in her voice as she said this that he was amazed that it conveyed no warning to Muller. Captain Muller, however, was already drinking heavily. He looked up when addressed and uttered a sound which might have been taken for an expression of polite acquiescence. Then he filled his glass again.

Mr. Snyder's parcel revealed a watch charm fashioned in the shape of a tiny candid-eye camera. "That," said Mrs. Pickett, "is a compliment to your profession." She leaned toward the captain. "Mr. Snyder is a detective, Captain Muller."

He looked up. It seemed to Mr. Snyder that a look of fear lit up his heavy eyes for an instant. It came and went, if indeed it came at all, so swiftly that he could not be certain.

"So?" said Captain Muller. He spoke quite evenly, with just the amount of interest which such an announcement would naturally produce.

"Now for yours, Captain," said Oakes. "I guess it's something special. It's twice the size of mine, anyway."

It may have been something in the old woman's expression as

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she watched Captain Muller slowly tearing the paper that sent a thrill of excitement through Mr. Snyder. Something seemed to warn him of the approach of a psychological moment. He bent forward eagerly.

There was a strangled gasp, a thump, and onto the table from the captain's hands there fell a little harmonica. There was no mistaking the look on Muller's face now. His cheeks were like wax, and his eyes, so dull till then, blazed with a panic and horror which he could not repress. The glasses on the table rocked as he clutched at the cloth.

Mrs. Pickett spoke. "Why, Captain Muller, has it upset you? I thought that, as his best friend, the man who shared his room, you would value a memento of Captain Gunner. How fond you must have been of him for the sight of his harmonica to be such a shock."

The captain did not speak. He was staring fascinated at the thing on the table. Mrs. Pickett turned to Mr. Snyder. Her eyes, as they met his, held him entranced.

"Mr. Snyder, as a detective, you will be interested in a curious and very tragic affair which happened in this house a few days ago. One of my boarders, Captain Gunner, was found dead in his room. It was the room which he shared with Mr. Muller. I am very proud of the reputation of my house, Mr. Snyder, and it was a blow to me that this should have happened. I applied to an agency for a detective, and they sent me a stupid boy, with nothing to recommend him except his belief in himself. He said that Captain Gunner had died by accident, killed by a snake which had come out of a crate of bananas. I knew better. I knew that Captain Gunner had been murdered. Are you listening, Captain Muller? This will interest you, as you were such a friend of his."

The captain did not answer. He was staring straight before him, as if he saw something invisible in eyes forever closed in death.

"Yesterday we found the body of a dog. It had been killed, as Captain Gunner had been, by the poison of a snake. The boy from the agency said that this was conclusive. He said that the snake had escaped from the room after killing Captain Gunner and had in turn killed the dog. I knew that to be impossible, for, if there had been a snake in that room it could not have made its escape."

Her eyes flashed and became remorselessly accusing. "It was not a snake that killed Captain Gunner. It was a cat. Captain Gunner had a friend who hated him. One day, in opening a crate

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of bananas, this friend found a snake. He killed it, and extracted the poison. He knew Captain Gunner's habits. He knew that he played a harmonica. This man also had a cat. He knew that cats hated the sound of a harmonica. He had often seen this particular cat fly at Captain Gunner and scratch him when he played. He took the cat and covered its claws with the poison. And then he left the cat in the room with Captain Gunner. He knew what would happen."

Oakes and Mr. Snyder were on their feet. Captain Muller had not moved. He sat there, his fingers gripping the cloth. Mrs. Pickett rose and went to a closet. She unlocked the door. "Kitty!" she called. "Kitty! Kitty!"

A black cat ran swiftly out into the room. With a clatter and a crash of crockery and a ringing of glass the table heaved, rocked, and overturned as Muller staggered to his feet. He threw up his hands as if to ward something off. A choking cry came from his lips. "Gott! Gott!"

Mrs. Pickett's voice rang through the room, cold and biting. "Captain Muller, you murdered Captain Gunner!"

The captain shuddered. Then mechanically he replied, "Gott! Yes, I killed him."

"You heard, Mr. Snyder," said Mrs. Pickett. "He has confessed before witnesses."

Muller allowed himself to be moved toward the door. His arm in Mr. Snyder's grip felt limp. Mrs. Pickett stopped and took something from the debris on the floor. She rose, holding the harmonica.

"You are forgetting your souvenir, Captain Muller," she said.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 494th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . the letter from the author accompanying the manuscript read: "This morning I decided it was time I wrote a first story. I'd been wanting to do so for years, but somehow found neither the time nor the courage. Now, since I've passed the great age of fifty, and am now a grandma, I feel time is running out" . . . So Mrs. Greenspan went and done it!

The author, Clarice Greenspan, and her family "live on the water, and that is my first love." She claims to be "a person of many small talents"—she paints, sculpts, does carpentry work, decorates, writes music, gardens, adores animals, and now has written her first fiction—a Renaissance grandma! . . .

DOLCHA VEETA

by CLARICE GREENSPAN

All of a sudden my life changed, and I didn't like it a bit.

Everything was gravy before. Joe and me, we have this little house on the bay. With the kids grown and just the two of us, it's been peaceful, and I'm a peaceful type of person. I just can't take pressure.

Joe does real well. Not so's I have help in the house or anything, but everything we need we got.

We have two boats. One's a 28-footer, and we take long weekends on it. It ain't that Joe loves the water and I'm one of those wives that tag along. Oh, no! It's me that loves the water.

For the fourth of July weekend Joe takes the boat out to Fire Island on Tuesday, so we'll be sure to get dock space. Then he ferries back to the mainland, and don't show up till Friday night.

Believe it or not, that's the best weekend of the year. Just me, the sand and sea, clamming, fishing, walking the trail in the early morning. Maybe seeing a couple of deer. Reading a little,

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and I always bring along some new hobby to fool around with.

The big boat is ours. The 14-foot runabout is mine. When we got it, we borrowed the money from our savings account, and I told Joe I'd put it back $20 a month. For a couple months I did, but food prices keep going up, and my allowance don't, so pretty soon I just stopped doing it.

Joe didn't get mad or anything. He sort of laughs sometimes when I say *my* boat, and kids me about it, but it's still mine.

Sometimes I just ride around. I like to explore. Lots of times I run aground because I don't know the waters there. But I learn. Like out by the first bridge on the Wantaugh Parkway there's this narrow channel into a nice big cove. Only thing is, it's through the flats and hard to get into. Once, at high tide, me and a friend (girl friend, I don't cheat on my Joe) pulled the boat across a sandbar and launched her on the other side. That's when we found the cove. Getting out, we kept running aground, but we finally made it through.

I like to ride the rough water, riding standing up, one hand on the wheel, the other on the windshield to keep my balance, my knees bent to take the pounding, and the waves washing over my head. So I ain't afraid to take my boat past the Captree Bridge into the Great South Bay.

It was good with me and Joe too. We still went for each other and still made it big, especially when we were out on the bay, with the water tickling the lapstrake and the screaming of the gulls. Our Love Affair—me and Joe and the Great South Bay.

Like I said, it was gravy. The sweet life! Dolcha veeta, like they say.

It was winter when Joe's mom died. Right away things changed for us. Joe's pop had no place to go, and couldn't take care of himself, him being on crutches. That was his own fault, pushing and shoving his way to the front of the platform, afraid he wouldn't be the first one on the train. He's lucky it cost him only a leg, and he's been trading on it ever since. "Poor crippled Pop."

"Put him in a home, Joe," I said. I knew he would mess up our lives. But this was one time Joe didn't hear me. His ears were full of remembering the warm words a little boy hears from his daddy.

So Pop moved in with us, and the sweet life was over. It was Mae-do-this, Mae-get-me-that all day long. It was Mae-take-me-here, Mae-take-me-there all day long. It was being bored all day,

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and whining because he had nothing to do, then complaining how I didn't take care of him if I asked him to do something. It was three cooked meals a day and never being alone. Mostly it was never being alone.

Things was different for me and Joe too. With just four inches of wall between us and Pop, we whispered to each other in the night, and it upset me if the bed creaked. I kept saying, let's wait for Pop to fall asleep, but Joe fell asleep instead.

We started picking at each other, saying mean things, and Pop egged us on, sometimes taking Joe's side, sometimes mine. He seemed happier. I guess he wasn't bored any more.

Somehow we made it to spring. I weighed ten pounds less and had two lines between my eyes that weren't there a year ago.

June busted out all over, like they say, and I decided I'd have to get away a little or crack up.

So one morning I fixed Pop's lunch, told him it was there for him whenever he wanted it, and that I was going clamming. (I love clamming best of all, but if they spit at me I figure they're fighting for their lives, so I throw them back.)

Well, Pop, he said great, he'll come along, and why not go fishing instead of clamming, because it's tough clamming with one leg.

So he came with me that day and the next and the next, and it was the same old story. Mae-cut-bait, you're-fouling-my-line, that's-no-way-to-handle-a-boat, anchor-her-this-way, on and on.

When I stayed home it was worse. Mae, Mae, Mae, all day long. Never alone. Sometimes he even spoke to me through the bathroom door.

At night, after Joe was asleep, I'd cry into my pillow. I'd cry for the way things used to be. I wanted my Joe back again, and my dolcha veeta. I'd think, dear God, how do I get out of this and not feel like I was a fish being reeled in? And I thought spit out the hook, Mae, you got to spit out the hook before it's too late.

Already it was June fifteenth, and soon it would be the fourth of July. How could I bear the fourth of July without the sand and the sea, alone with Joe over the weekend, with the waves nuzzling the lapstrake, the gulls screaming, and me in Joe's arms, loving, and being loved. So I knew what I had to do.

Early next day I said, Pop, I'm going fishing, and like usual he said, Good, I'll come along. So I said I was going out to the bay and it was going to be too rough for him. Well, he told me off

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good. About if I could handle it, he certainly could, me being only a woman and him better than any woman even with one leg. So I packed a couple of sandwiches and a Thermos of coffee, and we cast off.

The run out was beautiful. I felt the wind in my hair and the sun on my face, and so warm inside. The water was like glass till we passed Babylon, then it got a little choppy. It got rougher when we went under the bridge, but I kept right on going for a half hour or so, till Pop started complaining when were we going to start fishing and how he hadn't just come along for a wet bumpy ride.

Well, the spot looked good to me, the north shore well away and not a boat in sight, so I turned her west and idled her.

Well, all the time we fished, Pop complained as how we could've caught fish west of the bridge, and how I broke his back for nothing. When my line drifted under the boat he yelled for me to move aft and keep out of his way. But I said, no, I ain't moving, so he got madder and hand-over-handed himself to an aft seat.

We sat that way for a time, him watching the water and mumbling to himself, and me watching him. Then he yelled gotcha and stood against the transom, his stump on the gunwale.

We got to go home now, Pop, I sang out and pushed hard on the throttle. The boat leaped forward and I ran for the bridge singing into the wind, hanging on tight as the waves washed over my head. I never slowed or looked back for the half-hour run, and when I did I was alone.

Well, I yelled and cried, waving my arms in a distress signal, and I called Man Overboard, and I called Please Help Me and Call the Coastguard, and we all searched the area for a long time.

Then they took me home and called Joe, and after they told him what happened we cried together and I took him into myself to comfort him.

Now it's like it used to be. Me and Joe and the Great South Bay, and tomorrow is Tuesday and we're leaving for Fire Island. Four days of clamming and fishing, and a weekend with Joe, and loving.

"Q"

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 495th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . Life on the Costa del Sol, with a touch of Petit Guignol . . .

The author, Laurette Eustis (a pseudonym), was born in New Jersey in 1900—please note the date. She never went to college—have to admire this new author's indomitable spirit! She was married to a Professor of English at Harvard.

She has had a patchwork background: picking fruit with Okies; recording rainfall; molding plastic; proofreading and helping to edit 27 volumes on radar; copy editing and manuscript styling. And at the young age of 77 she travels, learns new languages, paints, gardens, and "reads, always" . . .

THE TOWER MILL

by LAURETTE EUSTIS

El Molino, the smartest little restaurant on the Costa del Sol, took its name from the long-disused windmill on the hillside just back of the kitchen. From behind a small but well stocked bar near the entrance Madame Odette, the owner, in black sweater and pants that did nothing to minimize her opulent curves, let her flashing black eyes rove with justifiable pride over her creation. In the sophisticated small dining room, lush green plants twined riotously between arched Moorish windows overlooking a moon-whitened sea. A rich aroma of sizzling butter, herbs, and garlic proclaimed the excellence of her chef, a Spaniard whom she had trained to her native Provençal cuisine.

Then her expression changed at the sight of her waiter frantically darting from table to table, visibly mixing up orders. His bow tie had worked loose and a blob of white sauce oozed down his maroon jacket. Her straight black brows met in a frown.

"Manuel! What's the matter with you tonight—can't you do anything right?" She shot out a hand and grabbed at his sleeve as

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he lurched past her, his arms dangerously overloaded with dishes. He ducked, so she probably missed the hatred in his eyes.

I didn't. From my post on the other side of the service window, behind and to the right of the bar as you face it, I saw and heard it all—the humiliation of Madame's harried young waiter. With every seat in the place occupied, as usual in the summer, how could she expect one waiter to take care of nine tables and in addition prepare the flaming specialties like crêpes suzette? It would be asking a lot of a mature, experienced waiter, let alone a skinny boy like Manuel, barely out of his teens. At first he'd taken her tongue lashings meekly: "Yes, Madame . . . no, Madame . . . sorry, Madame"; but lately I'd heard him mutter, "If she does that to me again I'll kill her!" Meaning publicly dressing him down, in front of the customers.

The kitchen helper (that's me, Charlie Beal) is admirably placed to see and overhear most of what goes on in the restaurant at mealtimes. Some of the bits and pieces, garnered over the summer, might well be used to flesh out The Great American Novel (in a foreign setting) that I'd been writing—until my university grant ran out. That was when Madame Odette found me at Betty's Bar in Malaga, where I was drinking up my last pesetas before throwing in the sponge.

"So," she said, taking in my faded jacket and ravel-bottomed jeans, "you ar-re br-roke, no? And hungry. How would you like to earn a little money working for me in my restaurant?"

Well, what did I have to lose? She certainly wasn't hard to look at—tall for a Frenchwoman; warm ruddy skin; thick black hair that she wore twisted in a knot on top of her head, from which the short hairs at the back of her neck escaped in crisp ringlets.

"A little money" turned out to be an all too accurate description of my wages—no tips, since I didn't appear in the dining room. But it does a little better than cover my room rent in a farmhouse on the hill above the restaurant, and besides, I eat at El Molino—magnificently when Frenchy (oops, I mean Madame) isn't checking what's on my plate. "French *avare*! Too mean to hire another waiter—"

"What's that you said?" The big ox of a chef lunged at me, swinging arms like a piledriver's. His ham-shaped head sported a tall white cap that grazed the low-beamed ceiling as he came in the back door. "*What* did you say?" (I must have spoken aloud. Watch it, Charlie.)

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"Nothing," I said. "Take it easy, Roberto. You know something, I think the kid's about to crack. Can't you get Frenchy—uh, I mean Madame—to let up on him?"

Roberto swelled with anger, his big stomach ballooning out a spattered white apron. Among the customary stains of gravy and olive oil from frying I noticed some darker smears that looked like engine grease. Since he didn't drive a car I wondered where he'd got them.

Looming over me, he shouted, "Nobody is telling her how to run this restaurant. Or me either. In case you don't know it, you are speaking to one who will soon have a lot more to say about—about things—" He whirled on Manuel who sagged whitefaced against the door, looking more than a little scared. "What are you waiting for, your order's ready—*take* it!"

Roberto had it bad over that woman; he didn't seem to realize she was just playing him like a big fish for all she could get out of him. Like flattering him into extra work without overtime pay: "Nobody, but nobody can cook like you, my Roberto. I think I make you my partner-r, no? If we have a good season." (According to Manuel she'd said that before.) One moment she'd be dripping honey, calling him in and introducing him to the customers, the next he would be ordered back to his stove while she flirted with the nearest reasonably good-looking male. I liked him in spite of his temper tantrums and felt sorry for him—torn as he was between two loves, the restaurant and Madame Odette.

For a time I had been her fair-haired boy: *"Char-lee,* I need your help, you ar-re so str-rong!" But that hadn't lasted more than ten days, and Roberto stopped giving me dirty looks. Her next fancy was a French salesman from Marseilles who reserved the same table every night business didn't take him to Paris or Milan. He ate seriously, devoutly, napkin tucked into his collar.

Tonight he was looking sulky; it must be because Madame hadn't visited his table. I could see her talking animatedly with what looked like her newest conquest, an expensively dressed Mexican for whom she was concocting a margarita, gazing raptly (or call it greedily?) into his eyes as she carefully rimmed the glass with salt.

Among Madame's admirers—maybe victims is a better word—the one Roberto seemed to hate most was a tall blond American with a yellow Jaguar sports car in which he would take Odette for a spin after the restaurant closed for the night. But he hadn't

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been around for a week; it could be his star was setting. The last time he came to the bar she turned her back on him. When she went on ignoring him he stormed out, looking as if he would like to wring her invitingly plump neck.

You have to hand it to Madame Odette. She's certainly transformed what had been a rundown little Spanish eatery into a first-rate gourmet restaurant with a polished modern décor. Everything was new and fresh, with the exception of the weather-beaten stone windmill. She *says* she keeps it for the name: "*El molino*—the mill, you understand?" Also for its picturesque appeal to tourists. "No," I'd heard her say, "we don't use it now to grind flour." Then, trying to move one of the vanes, "See, they no longer turn, but they look pretty, no?"

It's the kind called a tower mill, with four vanes of the right length to swing low enough for the miller, standing on the ground, to be able to reef the sails. I wouldn't care to be in the way of those descending vanes, made heavy by a narrow windboard on the leading edge. Whatever mechanism it is that controls their turning must have jammed or rusted long ago. On windy nights you can hear the vanes straining wildly for release.

But Madame has found another use for the roundhouse—the now empty circular space where the miller had kept his bags of grain. One day when the wind had blown the door open—she must have forgotten to lock it—I caught a glimpse of a bed made up with blankets and pillows, a vase of fresh flowers standing beside it. Roberto would blow a gasket if he knew!

At night the short path from the back door to the mill is in total darkness. I had no trouble in figuring out why she'd said an outside light would be an unnecessary extravagance. It looked like a certainty she and her Mexican would be going there tonight; by now I recognized the signs.

Somehow this nerve-racking evening seemed to be drawing to a close without anything catastrophic happening. I'm not psychic, or given to premonitions, but I could feel tension hanging over the tables like a cloud, affecting the diners as well.

Instead of the usual low hum of conversation a glum silence had set in, broken by complaints. Dishes were sent back to the chef: "Waiter, this meat is too salty . . . the wine is corked . . . look *out,* clumsy (this to Manuel, who had upset a wineglass)." The Frenchman stalked out, with a venomous glance toward the bar where the Mexican lingered, his head close to Madame's—he was

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the last to leave. She had an expectant look, like a cat that knows it's going to get a saucer of cream.

Out in the kitchen she patted Manuel's shoulder forgivingly. "Run along, little one, you need your sleep. Char-lee will help me clear the tables." She turned those sparkling black eyes on me. "Won't you?" she asked, then pointed to an overflowing garbage pail. "You can take that outside."

Roberto glared at me. "No, you don't—leave that till morning."

"But Roberto, the flies!"

Since I was already halfway to the back door I kept on going until he barred my way, yelling, "I said *leave* it. Don't go out there!" He staggered, blind with rage. "Get out of my kitchen!"

So we went out, leaving Roberto to lock up—something Madame usually takes care of herself. Feeling too much on edge to sleep, I crossed the highway and went into a bar on the beach side. After a couple of beers and some casual talk with the bartender I felt relaxed enough to start up the hill to my room.

The wind blew in gusts, from time to time sweeping clouds over a low-hanging moon. Since the going was rough I used a small flashlight. Except for the diminished hum of late traffic on the coast road, the night had few sounds, nothing to distinguish it from other summer nights on the Costa del Sol. But wasn't it too quiet? Some sound was missing—something I should be hearing on a windy night.

I turned and looked across the field—and knew right away what I wasn't hearing. I could see against the sky the great vanes silently slicing the night air. Someone had managed to release the brake, had greased the windshaft or whatever makes them turn. I didn't know what I feared, but I ran.

I skirted the descending vanes, and my flashlight found the hunched figure lying face down, her neck twisted at an unnatural angle, her black hair fanning out over one cheek. I touched the back of her head, felt the deep gash, and my hand came away sticky. Then I stumbled over a can. Picking it up I got my hand into another kind of stickiness, thick and smelling like a machine shop.

The key is kept under the back steps and I knew I ought to go inside and call the Malaga police. But I didn't. Let them find out on their own which of the obvious suspects was the murderer.

I'd been mistaken in thinking the killer hadn't known what went on in the windmill.

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a *NEW* Ed Gorgon story by

JON L. BREEN

To greet the new baseball season, a new story about Ed Gorgon, major-league umpire and big-league detective . . . "You don't understand, Ed," the manager of the Los Angeles Surfers said. "I mean he's vanished . . . It's impossible, Ed. It couldn't happen" . . .

THE NUMBER 12 JINX

by JON L. BREEN

Before I tell you about the impossible disappearance at Surfer Stadium, a little anecdote might be appropriate.

In a game at one of the midwestern ball parks last season, I'm umpiring behind home plate—my name is Ed Gorgon, and I've been a major-league umpire for close to three decades. Anyway, in this particular park you can't see all of the bullpen from home plate. You can tell when a relief pitcher is warming up, but you can't see who he is because he's hidden by a fence.

On this occasion I see the bullpen catcher hunker down and start to receive warmup pitches from a reliefer, and I casually say to the batter coming up to hit, "I see ol' Spook Durkin is heatin' up out there." The batter, a rookie and not the smartest guy in the league, looks at me like I'm Sherlock Holmes in a chest protector and says, "Ed, how can you tell that? How do you know who's warming up?"

It's so simple, I'm ashamed to explain it. "The bullpen catcher has his mask on. These masks aren't so comfortable you wear 'em without a reason, and you don't warm a guy up with a mask on unless he's a knuckleballer who has no idea where the ball he's throwing is going. And the only knuckler out there is Spook Durkin. Strike!"

The kid shakes his head in wonder before getting back in the

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box. "It's simple when you explain it, Ed."

"Yeah," I say. "Strike two!" The kid better get his mind on the game or he'll be back in the Coast League before he knows what hit him.

Anyway, that little story just shows how a man's acumen can get overrated, and it leads into the story I really want to tell you—about "Honey" Reed and his short career with the Los Angeles Surfers.

John "Honey" Reed, who could play six positions well and two others adequately, who could hit with power and run like your basic deer, came to the Surfers from Chicago with a reputation as a troublemaker. He seemed to need an excuse to live up to it, and he found it over the simple matter of choosing a number for his uniform.

The number Honey Reed wanted was the one he'd worn throughout his career—in high school, college, the minors, the majors—the number 6. And there was the problem. Although no L.A. Surfer was wearing number 6 when Reed came to the club, he was told he couldn't wear it.

Six had been retired by the Surfers, having been worn by the great ballplayer of years ago, Fritz Krieg, who had played for the Surfers back when they were the Bronx Lions, long before they moved west. Though nobody in L.A. had ever seen Krieg play, he was one of the greats who, if he hadn't had the misfortune of being the only Major Leaguer killed in World War II, might have been greater still.

The controversy raged throughout spring training. Reed reported and agreed reluctantly to train wearing number 7, but he swore that if he couldn't wear 6 on opening day he would not play ball with the Surfers. The papers and TV had a field day with it, making Fritz Krieg into a local hero on the order of Sandy Koufax, and reviving the old rumor that Krieg had actually met his death in a bombed brothel.

The long rhubarb came to a climax when the Surfers returned to town from Arizona for two exhibitions in their home park prior to the opening of the season. A meeting was called in the office of Frances Gabrielson, owner of the Surfers, and present besides Honey Reed were Surfer player-representative Mort Fredericks; Florence Krieg, the widow of Fritz; team publicist Terry Takamoto; general manager Roy Giddings; and field manager Barney Dunlap.

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The way the meeting was described to me later, everybody there except Fredericks is trying to get Reed to knuckle under and wear another number. Mrs. Gabrielson, a cool and elegant elderly lady, tries sweet reason and an appeal to team tradition, a tough case to make since the name Lions had been dropped for Surfers when the team came to L.A. Barney Dunlap's method of argument is loud and red-faced incredulity and an apparently genuine inability to comprehend anyone else's arguments.

The widow underlines the necessity she feels for keeping Fritz's memory alive, and Roy Giddings makes reference to Krieg's war record. At this point Takamoto, whose Nisei parents were interred during World War II, blows his top, swearing that Reed said under his breath, "On which side?" Reed denies the charge but apologizes to Mrs. Krieg and tells her he never believed the rumors about Fritz's death. Mrs. Krieg, white-faced, claims she doesn't know what rumors he's referring to.

One point of discussion is whether the Bronx Lions that Krieg played for and the Los Angeles Surfers are really the same organization for number-retiring purposes. Giddings claims they are, regardless of the move of several thousand miles, and Reed surprisingly backs him up. He says, "I've done a lot of research into the history of this club, and it is for sure the same organization." Is there some implied threat in Reed's voice, a slight chilling of the atmosphere for a moment? My informants disagree on that point.

Anyway, after much more discussion and replowing of the same ground, with Mort Fredericks halfheartedly defending Reed's right to the number he wants, the slugger suddenly decides to give in, to give up number 6.

There are smiles all around and mutual congratulations until general manager Giddings asks, "So what number do you want, John?"

"Well, if I can't wear 6, I'll make it twice 6. I'll be number 12."

Barney Dunlap groans, and there is an awkward silence.

Reed breaks it by asking his teammate, "Mort, there's nobody on the club wearing 12, is there?"

"No," Fredericks admits, "there isn't."

"We don't wear 12 on the Surfers," says Barney Dunlap flatly. "We just don't."

In a low voice Honey Reed inquires, "Is it retired, too, in memory of some Bronx Lion who died in World War I in a —"

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Mrs. Gabrielson breaks in quietly on Reed's offensive crack, and it's possible not everyone in the room even hears it. "Mr. Reed," she says, keeping her cool, "you must believe me that there are good and sound reasons for our unwillingness to have you wear number 12 and that they spring from nothing so much as a concern for your own well-being."

Reed will not be brought down, however. He blows up. "Look, I've gone out of my way to cooperate with you people on this. I wanted 6 and you said I couldn't have 6 and I said okay. Now I want 12 and for some reason you say I can't have 12 either. Well, I'm gonna have 12. If I play baseball for this club, that is. I don't need to play this game another day, you know—I have a restaurant, I have a bowling alley, and I have three offers to broadcast ball games. I can announce my retirement right here and now, and it won't hurt me one bit."

"Cool off, Honey," says Barney Dunlap. "Let us explain it." Barney, though, seems disinclined to start.

Finally, rather embarrassed, Terry Takamoto says, "Number 12 is jinxed."

"Jinxed? Look, I know most ballplayers are superstitious, but I'm not."

"Why were you so attached to number 6 then? Isn't that superstition?"

"No. It's a sentimental thing with me, but I don't really think 6 is particularly lucky—"

"John, I'm not superstitious either," says Mrs. Gabrielson, "but the history of number 12 on this club is really quite remarkable—horrible, actually—and I wouldn't want to take any chances with it. Tell him about it, Roy."

"Right," says Giddings. "You remember Alvin Hudspith?"

"Sure I do. Second baseman. Didn't he die . . .?"

"Of a beanball thrown by a Chicago pitcher named Abramowicz. One of only two men in baseball history to die as the result of a thrown ball."

"I was on that club with Abramowicz," says Barney Dunlap. "It ruined his career, too. Lost all heart for the game."

"Anyway, Alvin Hudspith was number 12 for the Bronx Lions. The next guy to wear number 12 was Ingemar Lundquist, a rookie first baseman for the Lions who could have been another Lou Gehrig. But one night he was out after curfew, had too much to drink, and wandered in front of a subway train. Nobody wore

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number 12 again until after the team moved west. Mort can tell you about the next guy to wear number 12. You were a rookie catcher with the club the year Willie Washington came up, weren't you, Mort?"

"Yeah, we came up together through the minor-league system. I caught nearly all his games, minors and majors. He won eight in a row wearing number 13—ol' Willie's not a superstitious dude, you see. But one day on the road his uniforms got lost in transit, so he wore number 12 instead. That day something popped in his arm, and he was never the same again. Two years later he was making a living tending bar."

Reed laughs and that doesn't endear him to Mort Fredericks. "An old story. Pitchers are just freaks anyway, and I don't think Willie Washington was cut out for great things. Damned if you need a curse to explain a sore-armed pitcher."

Fredericks looks fighting-mad for an instant, but Reed laughs again, disarmingly. "Do you really believe in it, Mort?"

They look at each other for a few seconds, challengingly some think, then Mort laughs too, with an effort. "No, not really. I think it's pretty silly."

"I don't," Barney Dunlap mumbles.

Reed adds, "Anyhow, at least Washington lived. Maybe the curse is wearing off." He laughs again, and those who were there swear it has a hollow sound, echoing off the walls of the office. "I'm wearing 12. Take it or leave it."

After a few moments of pensive silence Mrs. Gabrielson decrees that they take it. Maybe because, after that meeting, nobody in the room cares too much if the number 12 jinx keeps working or not.

Of course the papers pick it up, and they like the curse angle even better than they did the Fritz Krieg controversy. By the next night, when Reed is scheduled to make his debut in Los Angeles in the last exhibition game of the season, all L.A. and all baseball are waiting to see what terrible fate is going to befall John "Honey" Reed in his indifference to the number 12 curse.

All the parties to the meeting I described are there, too. Fredericks, of course, on the field; Barney Dunlap in the dugout; Roy Giddings and Terry Takamoto in the press box; and even Florence Krieg, as a guest in owner Frances Gabrielson's private box.

The game goes along in orderly fashion until the top half of the

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fifth inning. I'm umpiring at first base, and Joe Bidwell, a rookie ump, is behind the plate. Mort Fredericks is catching for the Surfers, who lead in the game 8 to 1, and Honey Reed, wearing number 12 and with a homer and single in defiance of the curse already, is playing first.

On a one-ball and two-strike count, the Surfer pitcher misses the outside corner of the plate with his pitch and Joe Bidwell calls it a ball. Fredericks, thinking the guy has struck out, is all ready to throw the ball around the infield and reacts violently to Joe's call. He tears off his mask, throws it into the dirt, gets red in the face, and starts jumping up and down. No call for it, as far as I can see. The pitch was close, but not that close, and Fredericks' team is leading by seven runs. The Surfer pitcher just stands there watching, as much puzzled by the theatrics as I am.

"That rookie ump's got a lot to learn, Ed," Honey Reed says to me at first base.

"You just play your position," I tell him, and I start toward home plate to make sure things don't get out of hand. As senior ump, I have to watch out for Bidwell.

When he sees me coming, Fredericks turns to me. Bidwell should have chased him already, and I'm determined not to take any guff from him.

"You saw it, Ed. We had him struck out."

"You can't appeal to me on a called strike, Mort, and you know it. Now this is just an exhibition game, and I don't want to toss anybody, but one more word from you and you are gone."

"Well, if the league's gonna recruit blind umpires—"

"That's it. Take a hike." I speak softly but give him the thumb so everybody in the ball park gets the message.

With an angry snort Mort picks his mask up from the dirt and goes storming toward the Surfer dugout. Barney Dunlap is still there, looking more puzzled at his catcher's behavior than mad at me. Of course, he knows if he comes out to argue a called strike, he'll be gone too.

I return to my position behind first. Honey Reed says, "That's a cheap shot, Ed."

"You do your job and I'll do mine," I say, baffled by all this fuss and rancor in an 8-to-1 exhibition game.

The batter hits the next pitch deep to shortstop. The Surfer infielder makes a great stop on the ball, but he's too far back and can't get enough on the throw, and on a close play I call the run-

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ner safe. All of a sudden Honey Reed is all over me.

"Ed, I had him and you know it!"

"Shut up and play ball," I say, beginning to run short of patience.

"It wasn't even close, damn it!"

"Reed, if you want to join Fredericks for an early shower just keep on talking."

This time Barney Dunlap comes out and starts jawing at me too, mainly to save his first baseman from ejection. I have the feeling Dunlap's heart isn't in his protest and he's as baffled by his players' antics as I am.

Barney's intervention does Reed no good. He can't stay away from me and before long I have no choice. He, too, gets a decisive thumb. Like Fredericks, he doesn't stick around once he's been bounced—why make the fine bigger? He just turns around and walks toward the Surfer dugout.

Barney gives me a last managerial glare, but his eyebrows do a sort of nothing-personal shrug, and he waddles back to the dugout. I suspect now we can play ball, and for a couple of innings I am right.

But around the end of the seventh, Barney Dunlap calls me over to the dugout.

"Ed," he says, "the damnedest thing has happened. Honey Reed has disappeared."

"Probably just went home early. Something was eating him, and I don't think it was just my calls."

"You don't understand, Ed. I mean he's vanished. Between the dugout and the clubhouse. He started down the tunnel, but he never got to the other end. It's impossible, Ed. It couldn't happen."

"Better get on the phone and tell Roy Giddings," I say.

"Ed, you're the big detective. Won't you sort of look into it?"

"I can't till after the game. I'm sure nothing happened to Reed, and there's a simple explanation for whatever seems to have happened."

"There's an explanation all right. He was wearing number 12—that's the explanation." Barney's fat face looks comically but sincerely terrified.

Of course, it's none of my business what happens to a player after he leaves the field, and I have no choice but to keep the game going. But all the way to the ninth inning the little puzzle of how Honey Reed could have disappeared on his way from the

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dugout to the locker room niggles at me.

After the game is over, I walk back to the locker room through the Surfers' tunnel, though the umps have our own route to our cramped dressing-room facilities. The one important point about the tunnel is that it makes two turns along the way, so that you can't see the whole tunnel from the dugout to the locker room. I'm pretty sure the walls of the tunnel are innocent of secret panels—there's no excuse for gothic trappings in a new baseball park. (Or in an old one, come to think of it.)

When I get to the end of the tunnel, Roy Giddings approaches me.

"Found him?" I ask the worried-looking general manager.

"No, we haven't. Ed, it's unreal. I can't figure it."

Naturally, it has occurred to me the whole thing may be a publicity stunt dreamed up by the Surfer management, but Giddings' look of worry appears genuine to me. Gradually, with unwelcome help from Barney Dunlap and other players, Giddings gives me the details of the mystery.

Gus Brend, the clubhouse attendant, was sitting in the doorway to the Surfer locker room when the ejected Mort Fredericks came storming through. Fifteen minutes later the team trainer came back for a forgotten piece of equipment, and at this time the tunnel was empty. Gus swears that between the time Mort came through and the time the trainer did, *no one came through the tunnel.* The ballplayers in the dugout are just as sure Honey Reed walked down the tunnel and never came back. Thus, number 12 has vanished with not so much as a puff of smoke.

A nice little problem, but surely still a joke of some sort, not a police matter just yet. I yield to the flattery of Giddings about my detective prowess and agree to do a little investigation of my own.

First I interview Mort Fredericks.

"What did you do when you came back to the clubhouse?"

"What I normally do—took a shower. I felt like breaking up the place, you guys had me so steamed, but I like old Gus and didn't want to make extra work for him."

"Gus didn't follow you into the clubhouse?"

"No, I motioned him to stay put in his chair. I didn't need anything and he looked kind of worn out."

"What was he doing? Did he have the game on the radio?"

"Naw, old Gus is stone-deaf. He just sat there—oh, I think he had the morning paper."

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"Could he have missed anybody coming through the tunnel?"

"Not old Gus. He's sharp-eyed. If he says nobody came through the tunnel after me, I have to believe nobody came through the tunnel."

"And you never saw Honey Reed?"

"Hell, no. I was still in the shower when the excitement started. First time I heard Honey was missing I had a towel wrapped around me and was wringing wet."

Next I have a word with Gus Brend. Gus looks right at my lips when I talk and doesn't miss a word.

"You're sure nobody came down the tunnel after Mort Fredericks?"

"Sure I'm sure."

"You were reading the paper though?"

"Off and on. Mostly just sittin', smoking my pipe."

"Weren't you curious about what happened when Fredericks came back?"

"Yeah, but his way of walkin' looked angry to me, and he motioned to me to just stay in my chair, so I did. I let 'em alone when they're that mad."

"You say he walked angry. How did his face look?"

"Didn't see it. He had his catcher's mask on."

"Does Fredericks usually smash up the place when he's mad?"

"Been known to. Not this time, though."

"Were you sitting in your chair all the time between the beginning of the game and the time Fredericks came storming through the tunnel?"

"Nope, I had my work to do, keeping the locker room and the clubhouse tidy."

"Nobody back there but you?"

"Nope."

When I'm through with Gus, I'm summoned again by Roy Giddings and Barney Dunlap, demanding amazing deductions. I'm a little short with them—of course, I have it figured out now, as you will too, and I decide my time's been wasted with something purely silly. Sick of playing games, I retreat to the umps' room, where my three colleagues haven't even started getting dressed, so fervently are they discussing the foibles of major-league ballplayers.

I strip off my uniform and step into the shower room, and at that moment the shoddy, publicity-smelling vanishing of Honey Reed becomes police business. He's lying dead on the floor of the

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umpires' shower, blood drying on a vicious wound on his skull.

A few hours later I'm sitting in Mrs. Gabrielson's private box, more an apartment really, overlooking a darkened ballfield. I'm nursing a drink and feeling a little uneasy—a man of my position as neutral arbiter fraternizing with the officials of a major-league club. Still, we've all been of interest to the police the last few hours and thrown together that way. So I sit sharing a drink with the publicist, the general manager, the field manager, and the owner of the L.A. Surfers. I'm telling them a little story. The police have left, taking the killer of Honey Reed with them.

"So when I went back to the dugout, leaving my fellow umps to watch over the body, I got Roy here to call the police and I immediately told Mort what had happened. What Mort told me then convinced me I knew who had killed Honey Reed and how the killing tied in with his disappearance."

"But Mort didn't tell you anything," Roy Giddings says.

"That's right—he didn't tell me anything," I reply, sipping my drink and enjoying myself. My Sherlock Holmes qualities may be overrated, but that doesn't mean I don't play them to the hilt when I'm in the mood.

"The meeting in my office," muses Mrs. Gabrielson. "That should have warned us something like this could happen. Reed seemed to have a threat in every word he said, as if he knew all sorts of terrible things about the Surfers organization and about all of us. Did he really?"

"I don't know how many terrible things there are to know," I say. "But basically I don't think so. He'd just heard a lot of rumors, and he was in a really nasty mood from the way you described it to me. It was easy for one of you to infer he knew something he really didn't."

"The disappearance," says Mrs. Gabrielson. "How did that work?"

"Simple. Did it ever occur to you that the catcher and the plate umpire are the only two people who appear on the ballfield in *disguise?* When Mort gets to that point halfway through the tunnel, where he can't be seen from either end, he stops and strips off his jersey, his chest protector, his shin guards, everything that identifies him as a catcher. His mask is already off. He leaves them there in a little pile and goes on down the tunnel. Old Gus isn't in his chair yet. If he was, Mort would have to do something to distract him and sneak by. At any rate, he goes into the

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clubhouse unseen. He doesn't have to worry about deaf Gus hearing him, of course.

"Then, when Honey Reed gets himself tossed out—like Mort, quite intentionally—he goes halfway through the tunnel, picks up the jersey and puts it on over his own, plus the chest protector, shin guards, and mask. Of course, he has to make sure Gus is in the chair before he comes storming past him, motioning him to stay there and going into the clubhouse. The key to it is that he has the mask on—no catcher goes around with his mask on except in the game, unless of course he aims to *disguise* himself—which is just what Reed was doing, pretending to be Fredericks.

"There's another tipoff about the mask. Why would a guy as mad as Fredericks is supposed to be when I kick him out even bother to pick up his mask out of the dirt, unless he has some particular use for it?

"If old Gus could hear and was listening to the game on the radio, the whole illusion could never work, because he'd know the different times of the ejections, and the time of 'Fredericks' passing him would be too late."

"Then," says Terry Takamoto, "the whole vanishing was just a practical joke worked out between Fredericks and Reed?"

"Right. Mainly by Reed, I think. It couldn't have been anything more important than a joke, because too many things could go wrong for anything really important to be riding on it. Gus could have seen Fredericks sneak into the clubhouse. Or he could have left his chair later and left the tunnel unviewed, blowing the whole illusion. The players all know Gus is in the habit of sitting there during the game, after an hour or so of working in the clubhouse, but it's not something you can absolutely count on. For a while I thought you were behind this, Mr. Takamoto—more space in the papers couldn't hurt the Surfers."

"I hope we have a classier operation than that, Mr. Gorgon," says Takamoto.

"And that we take the number 12 jinx more seriously, as well," says Mrs. Gabrielson. "Reed mocked it, and it punished him."

"In a way I suppose it did," I reply. "Anyway, I knew that as soon as Mort heard what happened to Reed, he'd own up right away to his part in the prank unless—"

"—he was the murderer," Takamoto finishes.

"Right, though I don't know if murderer is the precise term. Maybe manslaughterer, or anyway, for now, suspect. Fredericks

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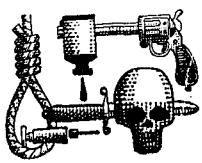
apparently hoped, stupidly, that the vanishing trick wouldn't be seen through and we'd think the curse had reached out and struck Honey Reed down. He confessed readily enough with a little questioning from the police. Not any kind of premeditated murder, I'm sure of that.

"Reed goes to hide in the umps' dressing room, and after Fredericks gets out of the shower, before the game is over, Fredericks goes down there probably to help Reed escape to some safer hiding place. They know we'll be back there when the game is over. The two of them get into a quarrel. Maybe Reed makes a crack about Mort's friend Willie Washington that hits too close to home. It seems for all these years Mort has felt guilty about the end of Washington's career. Washington really hurt his arm roughousing in a hotel room with Fredericks, and the two of them kept it a secret from the club. Mort was afraid that Reed, with his act of knowing everything, had found out all about it and would tell the club officials, though what Mort thought you folks would do to him for it I can't imagine. Anyway, the fear of Reed's giving him away is what persuaded him to go along with the joke in the first place.

"Anyhow, in the umps' room, Fredericks for whatever reason takes a poke at Reed who, says Mort, hits his head hard on a sharp corner in the shower room and dies. Mort decides to brazen it out. But if the vanishing trick is figured out, he's the obvious suspect—only he would know that Reed hid out in the umps' room."

There is a short silence. Then Mrs. Gabrielson speaks up grimly. "No Surfer," she says, "will ever again wear number 12."



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Murder at sea . . .

PERFECT CRIME

by MICHAEL AVALLONE

It was all so simple. A festive party at the captain's table and all the guests in assorted stages of relaxation. It was no trick at all to wait in the stateroom for Colin Browne.

The ship's crew and passengers didn't know him as Colin Browne, of course. Browne wouldn't be so foolish. He had posed as an American financier, crossing the Atlantic to complete a business merger.

Well, his career was over whether he knew it or not. The man waiting for him in the darkness was patient. He sat in a lounge chair close to the door.

He didn't wait too long. Somewhere in the time after darkness, as ship's bells tinkled on the bridge, Colin Browne entered the stateroom.

Browne was lurching slightly, humming a lilting tune. The man in the chair sprang behind him, pressing the edge of the knife against Browne's throat.

Browne's eyes bugged. The knife wielder whispered hoarsely in his ear, "You're a dead man, Browne. It's me, Wilstock."

Browne made strangling noises.

"I've waited long for this. Waited since the day you left Helen bearing your child. Left her to face the people of the village by herself. Do you wonder that she killed herself?"

Muffled sounds came from Browne's throat.

"I'm going to kill you, Browne. Now. Before you ruin any other girl's life as you did my daughter's."

Browne tried to struggle. But the knife was remorseless at his throat. He never had a chance.

The knife flashed, repeatedly. The white shirt front turned crimson. Browne's lifeless body sank to the floor.

The murderer left the cabin cautiously, closing the door softly. The corridor was deserted, as he knew it would be, thanks to the festivities in the main dining room.

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He walked quickly to the stairs leading to A deck. His heart was somehow very peaceful, despite the enormity of his crime.

Dark skies hovered as he turned up his collar against the night wind sweeping across the liner's modern decks. He passed a seaman heading toward the stern of the vessel.

"Nice evening," Wilstock ventured.

The seaman nodded glumly and pushed on. Wilstock shrugged. There had been some talk at supper that evening about icebergs but there was nothing to be alarmed about.

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME DOSSIER

by OTTO PENZLER

POT-POE-RRI: A required pilgrimage for all devotees of the detective story should be to the home of Edgar Allan Poe, the tragic genius who started it all and who gave his name to the most prestigious award offered to a mystery writer: the Edgar. Located at the corner of the Grand Concourse and Kingsbridge Road in the Bronx, New York, Poe Cottage is a picturesque wooden house built in 1812. The creator of C. Auguste Dupin lived there for the last three years of his life and his young wife, Virginia, died in its tiny bedroom. Administered by the Bronx County Historical Society, it is open for guided tours Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Sunday, 1:00–5:00 P.M., and Saturday, 10 A.M.–4:00 P.M. For other appointments or further information, call (212) 881-8900.

CARR-Y-ON: John Dickson Carr is with us no more, alas, but his memory and legacy is more enduring than any tombstone. One of the first tributes to the master of the puzzle story is *Notes for the Curious: A John Dickson Carr Memorial Journal,* edited by Larry L. French and published by the Carrian Press. Although a genuine labor of love, it is a slovenly job: a curious collection of *non sequiturs* with neither purpose nor significance, largely ill-written and apparently unedited. Still, its heart is in the right place, and the next issue of the Journal must be better. Limited to 500 copies, Volume One may be had from Dr. French for $5; he is at 14326 Milbriar Circle, Chesterfield, MO 63017.

NEVER A CROSS WORD: Many detective story fans are also crossword-puzzle buffs, for obvious reasons. Ruth Lake Tepper has hit on the happy notion of combining both forms of intellectual stimulation with *The Sherlock Holmes Crossword Puzzle Book* (Clarkson N. Potter, $2.95). Retelling 21 of the tales (since there are 60, the road is already cleared for a sequel or two) in a few pages, Tepper concludes each digest with a problem which can be solved only after the puzzle on

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the next page is completed. Ingenious and delightful, the book can be enjoyed equally by Sherlockians and the unenlightened. Not long ago, Tepper constructed a similar book, also tons of fun, called *Famous Murder Trials Crossword Puzzle Book* (Warner Paperback Library, 95¢) in which the jury's verdict is revealed by successfully filling in the puzzles. If there are better family books to pack for the beach or a trip, I've never seen them.

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BLOODY VISIONS

by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

Melodrama spices much of current theater and film this spring. In New York's prestigious, heavily experimental Public Theater, David Manet—thought of as one of our most important new playwrights (he wrote the very successful *A Life in the Theatre)*—is represented with *The Water Machine,* in which evil forces try to stop the young inventor of a device which can change water into gasoline. A curious play, told cabaret-style in the form of 1930's radio (the setting is a radio studio) with all of the ominous swirls and agitato doom which we fondly remember from the mystery airwaves. The Depression period and its most expressive voice—radio drama—is evoked by an absolutely unique suspense play which, along with its nostalgic framing, conveys a fine sense of dread.

Director Michael Crichton (himself a doctor) adapted Dr. Robin Cook's best-selling *Coma* for the screen, so with all the medical input we can assume the speculation about organ transplants being illegally used to be possible, but it doesn't really matter—at heart, the film is simply just a good thriller. Genevieve Bujold plays a young woman doctor whose investigation into certain routine procedures at a large Boston hospital uncovers an incredible criminal plot and places her own life in jeopardy. As we follow her through the endless futuristic corridors and closed laboratories, our own blood chills for the shocks are many. But the basic murder device (this is not the solution, for Bujold spots it early) is quite similar to the one used in what still remains the best, most chilling hospital mystery film of all, Christianna Brand's *Green For Danger* (1946).

"When there's no more room in Hell, the dead will walk the earth . . ." So whispers one of four living survivors in George Romero's

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Dawn of the Dead, a semi-sequel to his raw, powerful *Night of the Living Dead,* the 1968 macabre classic that in the past decade has achieved the status of Museum of Modern Art showings. Romero's interesting, highly individualistic style can also be seen in the upcoming release of *Martin,* a strange, interior little film which is a docu-drama about a teenaged vampire in a contemporary, dying American city. *Martin* is a quiet youth, pursued by half memories of dark exorcisms in other lands (at times he declares himself to actually be eighty years old, and we half believe him) as he makes the best adjustment he can to a grim obsession. The film was hailed at last year's Edinburgh Film Festival as an almost textbook example of suspense cinema ("a *danse macabre* of ferocious wit and invention"). Romero —in his novelization of his own screenplay, published by Stein and Day—claims that his object in creating this new vampire was not to dispel tradition, but to restate the phenomenon from a different perspective. As well, he makes *Martin* very vulnerable and understandable—even human and likeable—in an introspective portrait of some vitality.

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INTERVIEW: JORGE LUIS BORGES (2)

The distinguished Argentinian author was presented with a special Edgar Allan Poe Award by the Mystery Writers of America in 1976. (NOTE: The first part of this interview appeared in the April issue of EQMM)

EQMM: Some years ago, Ellery Queen selected for *Queen's Quorum* a book called *Seis Problemas Para Don Isidro Parodi (Six Problems for Don Isidro Parodi)* by H. Bustos Domecq. It was published in Buenos Aires in 1942. What was your connection with this book?

BORGES: It was a joke.

EQMM: Are you the author?

BORGES: No, I wrote it in collaboration with Adolfo Bioy Casares. They are parodies of detective stories.

EQMM: Why the pseudonym H. Bustos Domecq?

BORGES: Domecq was Casares' great-grandfather; Bustos was my great-grandfather. For stories such as this, it would be a big fuss to have on the title page: "by Adolfo Bioy Casares and Jorge Luis Borges." But if we put merely "by H. Bustos Domecq," they could be read for the fun of it, without fuss.

EQMM: It is a rare book, and few people even know it exists.

BORGES: Only one story has been translated into English.

EQMM: When so much of your other work is translated, why have these been ignored?

BORGES: They are parodies in slang. They are very difficult to

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translate. The detective, Don Isidro, happens to be in jail.

EQMM: In all the stories?

BORGES: Yes, always. In one story, a woman visits him and tells him that he has a beautiful cell. It is, she says, very cubist. That joke is dated now, but it does translate, at least.

EQMM: Have you written many other detective stories?

BORGES: No, I do not write detective stories. I have written many crime stories, but they are internal stories. There is no mystery, no detection, no detective.

EQMM: Do you enjoy detective stories, as a reader?

BORGES: Yes, I like them very much. I admire G. K. Chesterton. The Father Brown stories are very good. And Robert Louis Stevenson is very good. There are many books to admire.

THE JURY BOX

by JON L. BREEN

Fans of Craig Rice, a mystery headliner of the forties and fifties recently in publishing and critical neglect, will be glad to know one of her novels is finally back in print. *The April Robin Murders* (Signet, $1.50), left unfinished when Rice died in 1957, was completed by Ed McBain and published the following year. It is the third recorded case of sidewalk photographers Bingo Riggs and Handsome Kusak, sole proprietors of the ambitiously named International Foto, Motion Picture, and Television Corporation of America. Here they finally complete the trek to Hollywood begun in *The Sunday Pigeon Murders* (1942) and continued in *The Thursday Turkey Murders* (1943).

Rice's humor was gently wacky, her plotting wildly logical, her central characters soft-heartedly opportunistic. McBain's completion, done without benefit of inherited notes or outlines according to the new introduction he has written for this edition, is an expert exercise in pastiche. Readers who hope this publication will signal revival of the even better John J. Malone series, however, will not be encouraged by the cover of *April Robin:* McBain's name appears in giant print larger than the title, Rice's in tiny letters, though still top-billed.

Another recent reprint of note is the first paperback publication of the 1976 Edgar winner for best mystery novel, Robert B. Parker's *Promised Land* (Berkley, $1.75), the fourth recorded case of private eye Spenser. Though underplotted and overrated in my view, it is worth reading for Parker's fine witty style.

The headliner among this month's new books may seem at first glance to have too little criminous content to justify review in EQMM. But in the second half especially there is ample mystery

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and suspense, even a touch of detection. And the central event of the novel *is* a kidnaping.

**** Geoffrey Wolff: *Inklings,* Random House, $7.95. Mainly, though, Wolff is out to satirize the literary establishment, and so he does, wickedly and incisively. Narrator Jupe is as memorably (and mercilessly) drawn a fictional literary critic as Wilfrid Sheed's *Max Jamison,* and his adventures are full of bookish in-jokes, as when he composes a booklet called "When Your Novel Is Published: A Guide to Marboro Country." Framing the gags is a very neatly crafted suspense plot.

*** Michael T. Hinkemeyer: *The Fields of Eden,* Putnam, $7.95. A fine small-town mystery in which aging, likeable, politically beleaguered Sheriff Emil Whippletree gets the better of his foes and solves the gory murders of a minister's family. Somewhat distracting, though, in an essentially realistic narrative, are the whimsical names of some of the characters, such as suspects Mary Prone and Denny Bauch. (D. Bauch—get it?)

*** Nicolas Freeling: *Sabine,* Harper and Row, $7.95. Henri Castang investigates the death of a woman poet in a provincial French town. The exposition of French legal procedure continues to be enlightening, and the frequent comparison of Freeling to Simenon seems especially apt here. Commonplace mystery, estimable style and characterization.

*** M. K. Wren: *Nothing's Certain But Death,* Doubleday-Crime Club, $6.95. Conan Flagg, bookseller-detective of the Oregon coast, looks into the murder of an income-tax agent. Several of the characters deliver deeply felt anti-IRS diatribes. Sound puzzle story, with a dying message of less than Queenian ingenuity.

*** Ivon Baker: *Death and Variations,* St. Martin's, $7.95. The latest David Meynell novel hovers between espionage and classical detection, ending solidly in the latter camp with a surprising but fairly clued killer. Baker packs more plot and incident into his books than most and still finds room for some nice descriptive passages.

*** Duncan MacNeil: *Wolf in the Fold,* St. Martin's, $8.95. The latest volume in the saga of Captain James Ogilvie, British soldier in India in the days of the Raj, is a skillfully written action yarn with some mystery elements. The author is better known as Philip McCutchan.

*** Aaron Marc Stein: *Nowhere?,* Doubleday-Crime Club, $6.95. In Matt Erridge's newest case, engineering plays no part, and the reader is not periodically addressed as Charlie. Matt finds himself a Hitchcockian wrong man, accused of the murder of a young female hitchhiker whose destination was nowhere. A good problem, enlived by Stein's usual social observations and apt turns of phrase.

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REVIEWS OF NEW BOOKS

THE KREMLIN WATCHER, by Will Perry. Dodd Mead, $6.95.

Washington was stunned by the news of a workers' uprising in Poland. The President had to find out immediately if the Russian army would return to smash the rebellion. But who could discover the Soviet Union's plans in time—a top CIA agent in Warsaw or a scholarly kremlinologist in New York? Here is a taut, exciting novel of a front-line spy caught up in dangerous events in a turbulent and often hostile country, and of an ivory tower analyst whose work revealed a dramatic new aspect of kremlin watching.

"A rare bird—a convincing story about kremlinology." — Victor Zorza, Columnist for *The Washington Post* and *The Manchester Guardian*

ELLERY QUEEN'S MASKS OF MYSTERY, edited by Ellery Queen. The Dial Press, $8.95.

In this hardcover edition of Ellery Queen's Anthology #35 Ellery Queen poses an interesting question. What are the masks of mystery?

Are the clues in a detective story what they appear to be? Is the supposedly trivial clue really the important one? Are the motivations as compelling as they seem? Which are the significant threads of investigation and which are the red herrings? Are the suspects lying or telling the truth? Is the finger of suspicion pointing in the right direction? All the stories in *Masks of Mystery* have more than one mask hiding the truth. Why not play detective yourself and try to see behind them?

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	RETAIL PRICE	DISCOUNTED PRICE
Anderson, J. R. L.	DEATH IN THE CARIBBEAN	Stein & Day	$7.95	$6.35
Bagley, Desmond	THE ENEMY	Doubleday	7.95	6.35
Baker, Ivon	DEATH AND VARIATIONS	St. Martin's	7.95	6.35
Brett, Simon	STAR TRAP	Scribner's	7.95	6.35
Clark, Gail	DULCIE BLIGH	Putnam	8.95	6.95
Clark, Mary Higgins	A STRANGER IS WATCHING	Simon & Schuster	8.95	6.95
Coltrane, James	TALON	Bobbs-Merrill	8.95	6.95
Eberhart, Mignon G.	NINE O'CLOCK TIDE	Random House	6.95	5.50
Ferrars, E. X.	MURDERS ANONYMOUS	Doubleday	6.95	5.50
Edited by Ellery Queen	MASKS OF MYSTERY	Dial	8.95	6.95
Freeling, Nicolas	SABINE	Harper & Row	7.95	6.35
Hinkemeyer, Michael T.	THE FIELDS OF EDEN	Putnam	7.95	6.35
Lewin, Michael Z.	THE SILENT SALESMAN	Knopf	7.95	6.35
MacNeil, Duncan	WOLF IN THE FOLD	St. Martin's	8.95	6.95
Perry, Will	THE KREMLIN WATCHER	Dodd, Mead	6.95	5.50
Seaman, Donald	THE COMMITTEE	Atheneum	6.95	5.50
Stein, Aaron Marc	NOWHERE?	Doubleday Crime Club	6.95	5.50
Wilcox, Collin	THE WATCHER	Random House	6.95	5.50
Wolff, Goffrey	INKLINGS	Random House	7.95	6.35
Wren, M. K.	NOTHING'S CERTAIN BUT DEATH	Doubleday Crime Club	6.95	5.50

*PLEASE NOTE: ADD 10% TO DISCOUNT PRICE ON ALL CANADIAN ORDERS.

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DETECTIVE DICTIONARY

by John H. Dromey

Circumstantial evidence: he was accused of embezzling from the soil bank—they caught him with dirt under his fingernails.
Dirty Hairy: a copy in need of a shampoo.
Fingerprint evidence: the decision of the smudges is final.
Handcuffs: calculated wrists.
Insomnia: resisting a rest.
Insufficient evidence: the mugger got away with it—he was wearing unmarked shoes.
Jail: bust station.
Jail-cell key: can opener.
Lightning arrestor: a copy who speedreads the suspect's rights.
Loophole: tax murderer.
Loser: a copy who stops a porcupine on suspicion of shoplifting knitting needles, and gets sued by the ASPCA for false arrest.
Security camera: coptometrist.
Thanksgiving: only 26 shoplifting days before Christmas.
Tight security: when the nightwatchman drinks.
Tippy-toeing: the rite to remain silent.

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"Q"

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a *NEW* short story by

AVRAM DAVIDSON

"We don't expect some government bureau to do anything for us that we can do ourselves . . . oh, that's a very important Dawnside principle," said the Master Craftsman of the Dawnside Place . . .

BUSINESS MUST BE PICKING UP

by *AVRAM DAVIDSON*

The scene was archetypal. The sweet gray-haired woman was trying to persuade the rugged gray-haired man to let her discard some of his old clothes. "No, I am *not* 'throwing them away,' " she said. "I am giving them to the town church for the annual sale."

"No, you are *not* 'giving them to the town church for the annual sale,' " he said. "I'll make a cash contribution instead, but I don't want a thing gotten rid of—not a thing!"

He was firm, but not angry. Neither was she. They knew each other well. "What, not even—not even," she groped, came up with several articles of old-fashioned look, "not even *these,* for goodness' sake? When was the last time you wore silk socks? —And besides, *what* cash?" She looked at him with affectionate impatience.

"Never you mind about that, it will be forthcoming when needed; no, not a *thing.* These old clothes, I can wear around the mill or the garden."

The room and the rest of its contents were neither new nor rich, but everything held and released the glow of things well made and well taken care of: paneled walls, furniture, bedspread and quilts. Stained-glass windows. Hand-crafted chandelier. Even the shade on the bedside lamp, and the bindings of the books.

"Ohhh, I suppose—" Her voice trailed off, then was renewed

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as she lifted her hands. "And the old stockings, will you wear them around the mill and the garden? One is red and—why, they don't even match! But, I suppose—"

They had had this scene before. She always lost. And she always tried again. "Look at them! I could almost swear that they've shrunk. —Anklets," she murmured, prepared to drop them, and the subject, too.

"Never mind," he said, also prepared to end it, but not for a few words more. "Never mind. I like things the way they are. No, don't throw away a thing. Do I tell you to throw away stuff in the kitchen?"

She shook her head. "No, you don't. And that's one reason we don't have to apply for food stamps. Yes, I know. I know all about it. Well. Be on about your business, you—you old master craftsman, you! Going to the kiln?" she asked, as he, with a final grunt, moved toward the door.

He tugged out his old watch, cupped and scanned it. "No, kiln won't be ready for over an hour." His rugged face split into a smile. "Man there waiting impatiently, even though I told him they'd have to *cool,* for gosh sake! 'I've come five hundred miles,' he says, 'and I'm not leaving without them soup bowls!' "

The gray-haired woman closed the closet door. "Well, I'm glad there are still some people who want them, big as they are. How long did it take the last batch to sell?" He did not answer, and she did not expect he would. So, "Find out how Sister Ferguson's arthritis is this morning" were her last words as he left.

A man of his own decade walked slowly along the graveled path, looked up now, and greeted him as "Brother Johnson."

"The gravel isn't here 'just for fancy,' as the Pennsylvania Dutch put it, no, Brother Washburne. Done with forethought. No mud in the springtime, no dust in the summertime. That is the way we work, here at the Dawnside Place. Forethought is an important Dawnside principle. Sister Johnson thinks the soup bowls may be too big for you," he said, with a slight quirk of his mouth.

Mr. Washburne's heavy face sagged. "Too big for *me?* Why, a soup bowl can't be too big, way *I* look at it!"

"Way *I* look at it, too—"

"When I want a bowl of soup, I want a *bowl* of it! Not a cup . . . Keep this place real neat, Brother, I see. Not a fallen leaf, so much as."

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As they walked through the grounds, so carefully taken care of that a stranger might have thought that all the trees and shrubs had been hand-planted instead of—for a large part—being the carefully preserved original plant-cover of the landscape, Brother Johnson explained that not even a leaf was suffered to wither uselessly at the Dawnside Place, nor were they burned—so wasteful! Some went directly into the compost heap and some went there indirectly, after having been of service in the barn. That way Dawnside had to plant less grass for hay and could devote the land saved to other crops. No, of course the cows and goats did not eat leaves; the leaves were spread on the floors of their stalls. There was no "spoiled hay" at Dawnside.

"Nor much of anything else," he added.

Mr. Washburne was impressed. "Department of Agriculture comes up with some good ideas, sometimes," he said.

But that was the wrong thing to have said.

The Department of Agriculture had absolutely nothing to do with it, the Master Craftsman of Dawnside Place told him, using a good degree of emphasis. Employing fallen leaves for other purposes was just plain old-fashioned common sense and American know-how. "Department of Agriculture! Federal Government! People expect the government to do *everything* for them these days—the Federal Government, I mean. What's going to become of the good old American get-up-and-go, is what I'd like to know?"

Mr. Washburne said that he agreed with him a hundred percent.

"*We* don't expect some government bureau to do anything for us that we can do for ourselves," Brother Johnson swept on. "Oh, *this* is not one of your so-called art colonies, subsidized and federalized, no, nor one of your factory-in-the-field kind of farms, either! Never let *anyone* do for you what you can do for yourself—oh, that's a very important Dawnside principle, Brother Washburne. Create your own beauty by your own honest toil is our motto. 'Whatsoever thy hands find to do, do it with thy might'—can't improve on *that*, can you now?"

Mr. Washburne said that he agreed with him a hundred percent.

"No!" cried the Master Craftsman of the Dawnside Place. "Elbert Hubbard showed us the way. The Shakers had already showed *him* the way. We raise our own food here—well, almost *all* our own food. We mostly make all our own clothes here. We

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make *all* our own furniture, we dip our own candles, we print our books on presses we have made ourselves, and we make our own pottery and glassware and paper. Some is wallpaper. I lost track of how many prizes our hand-printed wallpaper has won. And some is high-quality paper for our hand-printed books. We cast our own type and do our own engraving and coloring and binding and make our own cardboard and cartons for shipping and—"

Mr. Washburne, whose head had drooped slightly, now said that they were certainly beautiful books, for sure. "Wished I could afford to buy some. And some of your other beautiful stuff, too. Your stuff is kind of expensive, though—oh, mind you, not that I don't mean to imply, uh, why they are certainly worth every penny of it, and I don't begrudge the price of them soup plates which I've been saving up for, oh, two years now. —Say, how are you folks set up as a business here?" he asked, showing a slight embarrassment and a desire to change the subject.

They were set up as a corporation like any other corporation, the Dawnside leader explained. Receiving certainly no favors as such from the Federal Government. "We craftsmen and craftswomen hold all our stock ourselves, and I am merely the first among equals, as Chairman of the Board of Directors."

Mr. Washburne asked, "How's business?"

There was a brief silence. "Slow," said the Chairman of the Board. "Yes. Business is slow right now. Taxes are too high. People don't have the money to pay for quality right now." Nothing was said for a while. Presently they came to a low building of hand-pressed brick and unpainted timbers; it too had stained-glass windows of birds and flowers and plants.

"I'll just step into the office for a minute," said the Master Craftsman.

Mr. Washburne said he'd wait outside and enjoy the air. A large automobile drove up to a halt and two grown-up people and two small children peered out of the windows. "Say, what is this place?" the man asked.

Mr. Washburne straightened up in his seat on the hand-fashioned bench. "Why, this is the famous Dawnside Place," he said.

The woman gave a sort of gasp of surprise. "Oh, is this the famous Dawnside Place?" she exclaimed. "Why, I heard about this place when I was just a little girl!"

"I want a hamburger," said a child.

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"I want French fries," said the other child.

"Say, I thought they'd gone out of business," the man said. Mr. Washburne laughed at the very idea. "Yeah, sure, I heard they'd gone out of business. Or were *go*ing out of business. All that old-fashioned junk they make. Sure. I heard—"

"—hamburger—"

"—French fries—"

The woman asked if they served food here. Mr. Washburne nodded. At the Guest Table, he said. Three times a day. Not *now*, though. And he was in the midst of advising them that they wait around when the large automobile took off at high speed and was gone in a flurry of gravel and exhaust smoke.

The door opened and the Master Craftsman came out. His ruddy face looked much less than cheerful. "Didn't even say thank you," murmured Mr. Washburne.

Brother Johnson grunted. "What did *they* want—hamburgers? People *live* on that nowadays. Why, what is the matter with good old-fashioned meat-and-oatmeal-loaf? Good old-fashioned scrapple? With *hash*? Anything the matter with our old-fashioned-style hash and mashed turnips?"

"Not a thing," Mr. Washburne said staunchly. "Say, I guess I'm going to take a little rest-up before lunchtime. My soup bowls won't be ready for a while yet, I guess." He had a hopeful, questioning note in his voice.

"Be ready soon as they cool," the Master Craftsman said firmly. "Well, I got to go to town, do some bank business, so I'll give you a lift to the Guest House."

" *'Pre*ciate that."

In the car Mr. Washburne said nothing. Brother Johnson clutched the wheel, breathing heavily. "Sister Ferguson," he said. "Known that woman forty years. For-ty years. Taught her the ancient art of stained glass. The ancient arts of spinning and weaving. Taught her typing and double-entry bookkeeping. Taught her how to look on beauty, clear. Now she wants to sell out. To—sell—*out!* 'Either get one of those Federal grants like everybody else is doing,' is what she said. 'Never while I draw *breath*,' I told her, 'will I ask the Federal Government to do one thing for me which I can do for myself,' is what I said. Asked her, 'What? You going *soft* in your maturity?' "

Mr. Washburne's mild indeterminate sound might have been sympathy. Or sleepiness. The trees and shrubs and scattered

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buildings of the place looked rather bare under the gray sky. Brother Johnson made a surprised noise. "What? Gone past the Guest House?" he asked. He looked briefly aside at the other man. "Well, I'll back up, then. No problem. —Solve our *own* problems," he admonished.

He leaned over and opened the door. "Got a good three-quarter hour before the bell rings for lunch. Notice its mellow sound, by the way. Cast that bell m*yself*," he said proudly.

Alone in the car he continued his conversation. " 'Sister, you are not going to sell *out,* are you?' is what I asked her. For-ty *years,* oh, I saw it coming. I knew. I could tell. 'Either to Washington or to you or to Tom, Dick, or Harry,' she had the brass to say. Said, 'If no Federal grant, then buy my shares out,' says she. 'The grant will pay for an apprenticeship program, a lot of young people are interested in learning old arts nowadays, and we can install a new heating system; otherwise *I* am going to Florida and I am *not* going to spend one more winter shivering before my hand-crafted fireplace!'

"Apprenticeship program! *Young* people! *Hip*pies! Sister *Fer*guson!" he concluded.

"What's that, hey, Johnson?" asked the man at the gas station.

"Huh? *Oh.* Oh, just talking to myself. Fill 'er up. Regular."

The man at the gas station said, "Must have money in the bank, talking to yourself that way."

The Master Craftsman grunted and said, "I'm going to *put* some money in the bank, soon as you put some gas in my tank."

"Well, good. Guess I'll be able to deposit that post-dated check you gave me for last month's bill." He moved on back to take the cap off the tank. After a while he put it back on, made out the new bill with a small pencil stub, handed it in for the Master of Dawnside to sign. "My brother Bob," said the man at the gas station, "he draws disability, he draws Social Security, he draws Food Stamps, he don't have to worry about the oil company trying to force the independent distributors out of business, he don't have to get out of bed at half-past five in the morning."

The Master of Dawnside handed back pad and pencil. "The day *I* ask the Federal Government to do one single thing which I can do myself," he said grimly, "is the day I hope to die."

In town he parked carefully in front of where Snyder's Grocery used to be—Snyder's had often bought Dawnside products—and

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ignored the wide parking lot of the supermarket—which had never bought from Dawnside. He waited in the bank till Mr. Hopkins, the senior cashier, had finished with another customer, then stepped up to his window. Mr. Hopkins' small face smiled, cheeks as shiny as those on a crisp apple. Very softly he said, peering through his thick glasses, "Oh, good, you can catch up on your taxes, then." He picked up the deposit slip.

"Yes," said the Master Craftsman, "I can give the Federal Government some more of my money. So it can give it all away again to somebody else."

Mr. Hopkins sighed and nodded. "How true . . . One thousand, and one, two, three, four, five. Makes fifteen hundred. That's it?"

"That's it for *now*."

"All in crisp new bills. Business must be picking up. Or"—and a roguish twinkle came into his faded blue eyes—"maybe you print them yourself, do you? Say, they look just about as good as what the government makes!"

"Just *about,*" said the Master Craftsman of Dawnside.

The two older gentlemen had a quiet little laugh together, at that one.

"Q"

NEXT MONTH . . .

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a *NEW* detective story by

THOMAS WALSH

Detective Shanahan's life fell apart the night he and Christina celebrated their fifth month of marriage—Shanahan's life and his whole world. Never again would Shanahan open his heart. His door would be closed to the world. From now on he was only an onlooker, an uninterested member of the human race. . .

THE CLOSED DOOR

by THOMAS WALSH

That night Detective Shanahan splurged on their fifth anniversary—their fifth monthly anniversary. But on his way home from the precinct he passed the ice-skating rink in Rockefeller Plaza where they had met only last winter, on a blind date with Lou Anderson and his girl, and it came to him how very little they had known each other in those days. What a chance they had taken! What two entirely different people they might have turned out to be from what each had imagined! Whereas in place of that, and although Detective Shanahan had only courted her for three weeks . . . But now, perhaps, it was required of him to be properly thankful, and to show that he was.

So at home he had Christina dress to the nines—she always had great style—after which they had dinner at the best French restaurant in midtown and went on to one of the hit Broadway musicals.

"But my golly," Christina said on the way home. She was always the saving one too. "You must have spent more than a hundred dollars tonight. Know what? I think you're kind of glad you got me, old boy."

"I wouldn't count on that," Detective Shanahan told her, in the

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way they had. "You're just living in a fool's world, Chris. One of these days I'm liable to turn you in on a new model."

"As if you could," Christina said, contentedly, resting against his right shoulder. "Or me, either. I think if I had ninety million dollars in the bank and was queen of all Hollywood, there's only one man I'd want in the whole world, or ever would want."

"And who's that?" Shanahan demanded. "Confessing, eh? What have you been keeping from me?"

"You just guess," Christina murmured. "Guess twice, even. I'm not going to spoil you any more than I do now. But you better let me out in front of the apartment, Dick. It's beginning to rain."

So Shanahan went on to a parking space down the street and trotted back from it quickly and happily. They only had a three-room apartment as yet, very cramped quarters, and often, when squeezing past one another in the bedroom passage or out in the kitchen, it seemed that Christina had to hug Shanahan for no reason, or Shanahan had to hug Christina. Then they would stand there, arms tight around each other, and laugh at themselves. They were very happy, absurdly happy. Often it seemed to Shanahan that they had discovered a secret, a marvelous and extraordinary secret, that no one else had ever even suspected.

But when Shanahan bounced up the steps into his apartment entryway that night, Christina was not alone. Two men were with her. One crouched over her where she lay, trying to yank the purse out of her hands, and the other spun around instantly when he heard Shanahan. "Now watch it," he ordered in a high shaky voice, eyes darting around, and showing the gun in his hand. "I'm telling you something. Keep the hell out of our way, man."

But of course Shanahan didn't. He went ahead in one blind, maddened lunge, everything exploding in him, aware of Christina's face with all the blood on one side, and of the half-conscious low moan she had uttered. Then the man on his knees smashed her again, as if with the frightened yet frenzied desperation of a drug addict, while the other one fired the gun in his hand.

Shanahan went down sprawling. His right leg felt all smashed. But he was not really conscious of that, and although the doctors said afterward that it was impossible to have done such a thing with his ruined knee, he got up again and ran after the two men down the dark cellarway at the back of the hall. With his first bullet he dropped the first man at the bottom of the steps. He dropped the second one in the yard. Then he ran back up the

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stairs, again an altogether impossible feat as the doctors saw it, and got Christina in his two arms. She was able to say only one thing.

"Help me," Shanahan heard. "Please help me, Dick. It's the whole side of my head. It hurts so—"

"Well, how it was," Lieutenant Francis McConnell explained uncomfortably the next morning, "she cried out for help when they jumped at her from the cellarway, and we found that two families on the first floor heard her, and one on the second. But they didn't so much as open their doors to see what it was. They were afraid, they said. They didn't think it was their business. But if they had even shouted down to ask what it was, they'd probably have stopped the second smash she got. And then, maybe—what the hell kind of a world are we living in, anyway? What have we come to?"

"I don't know," Shanahan said, one arm over his face, his voice dull and empty. "But I guess I never even knew it before. She didn't come through the operation, did she? That's why you're here."

Francis McConnell said nothing. He only reached forward, took hold of Shanahan's forearm, squeezed it powerfully, and kept his hand there. Shanahan closed his eyes and shivered slightly. Then he pressed his arm over his eyes so that Francis McConnell should not see what he was doing, and turned his head.

He never went back to the apartment. He knew he could not trust himself near the two families on the first floor, and the one on the second. His sister Mary disposed of the living-room set and the curtains Christina had made with her own hands. Always very clever that way, Shanahan recalled, always ironing his shirts or sewing his buttons on or cooking his dinner. "And that nice laugh she had," his brother-in-law Al Kennedy mourned. "What they call infectious, I guess. Every time you heard it you had to laugh right out loud with her. She just made you, somehow. Remember, Dick?"

"Yes," Shanahan said, limping over to look out of the window so that Al Kennedy would not see any more than Francis McConnell had. "Yes, I do. I remember, Al."

But he could stay only two weeks with the Kennedys. Then, still on sick leave, he limped downstairs one morning, got his

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suitcase out of the hall closet, and began packing. "I don't know," he said, when Mary asked him where he was going. "Just want to be alone for a while, Mary. That's all I can tell you."

He drove north simply because the parkway led in that direction. Late in the afternoon he was up into Adirondack country, mountains and trees, lakes and rivers, and about half-past four he pulled into one of the rest stops. There was great quiet around him when he had shut off the motor, a deep, faintly humming quiet. Most of the foliage was long gone, but now and again a few leaves drifted down lazily in the golden October sunlight. The lake in the valley under him shone very blue, and there were a few tranquil white clouds high up over the mountains. "Help me," he remembered then. "Please help me, Dick. It hurts so—"

What a fool he had been, Shanahan thought then. What a stupid child's world he had believed in, where there were decent human beings to help one another in time of need. Yet the truth, actually, was much different. There had been no one to help Christina. There had been no one to even open a door for her. Trouble? Then keep yourself safely out of it. That had been the help she got. See no evil. Hear no evil. React to no evil. It was not their problem. Then why should they get involved in it?

So now he knew. There had been a time when he had been stupid enough to believe that it was a very fine thing to do whatever he could, when the chance offered, to prevent crime and injustice and violence. But what could he believe now, when the doors had not been opened to Chris, and the human response not made? He had known that such things frequently happened in any city, and in his own working life had known them to happen time after time.

Not until now, however, had he faced up to the brute fact. The human condition was unspeakable beyond words. Decency did not exist and had never existed, just as a girl named Christina Shanahan did not exist now. Aware of the sparrow, one had been taught—and so, obviously, aware of the two men. But like the families on the first floor and the one on the second, no majestic hand had been raised, no desperately needed help had been given.

After a while, after a long while, Shanahan got out of the car. He limped down to the lake, his teeth clenched painfully, tore the detective shield out of his wallet, and threw it as far as he could into deep water. Then he limped back, his teeth still clenched, and about dusk stopped in a small town just off the Northway.

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His decision was made. From now on Detective Shanahan's door would also be closed.

Before unpacking, he decided to have a drink in the motel bar—he always had to have four or five drinks a night now, in order to sleep—and in the bar had the first adult test of his life.

It was a small motel, not too busy at this time of year, and there were only a couple of other customers in the bar. One was a big burly man with flaming red hair, a red face, and a loudly arrogant voice, and the other was all in gray—gray suit, gray shirt, gray tie, gray and narrow, tight-lipped young face. They were not, Shanahan could see, mountain people. They had different manners and different voices, and a city-wise toughness that showed in everything that they said and did.

They had just been served drinks, but after glancing around at Shanahan the redhead deliberately emptied his on the floor.

"You mixed it," he told the bartender. "And I wanted it on the side, Baldy. Try again."

"Then why didn't you say so?" the bartender muttered. "All I heard you say was a rye and a Scotch. Who's paying for that drink?"

"Couldn't tell you," the redhead drawled, obviously enjoying himself. "Only I ain't. You get what you ordered, Charley?"

The gray one tried his drink, made a face, and shoved it back.

"What the hell is that?" he demanded. "I asked you for rye, Baldy. What did you give me?"

A slow flush came to the bartender's cheeks.

"I gave you the bar whiskey," he said. "You didn't ask for any particular brand, mister. So I—"

"Some bar whiskey," Charley said. "Think maybe you better try again with me too. You know something? I think he's trying to clip us, Leo."

"Always did before," Leo said, dropping some coins in the jukebox. "Every time we come up to this dump. Last time we had about eight drinks apiece and all he rang up on the register was for two beers. Clipping the boss too. Think we didn't notice, Baldy?"

The bartender poured again, his hands shaking either with anger or fear, but he did not say anything. Returning from the jukebox, Leo glanced out the window, then at Shanahan.

"How's the weather outside?" he wanted to know. "Getting any colder, Gimpy?"

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Shanahan, the new Shanahan, did not answer. He was nothing more than an uninterested onlooker now—the way of the world.

"I'll have a very dry martini," he told the bartender. "On the rocks."

"Well, well, well," Leo drawled. "Very dry martini, Baldy. We got some class in here now."

Shanahan sat down on the bar stool farthest from them, got his cane into position, and rested the bad leg on it. For a while the jukebox blared away, and Leo and Charley murmured, as the bartender, still flushed and upset, polished and repolished the same highball glass. The gray man drank quickly and edgily, glancing up at the clock often, then drumming his fingers on the bar. At last, after a few more drinks, he got up and touched Leo's arm.

"Okay," Leo said. "Time, huh? What's the tab, Baldy?"

The bartender put down the glass. It was obvious he did not like that name and just as obvious he would not challenge it. But it was not Shanahan's affair—the closed door now.

"Five ryes and three Scotches," he said. "Let's see. Dollar ten for the ryes, five fifty, and dollar and a half for the Scotches, four fifty. An even ten, mister."

"You think so?" Leo grinned. "How many ryes you have, Charley?"

"Two," Charley said, with a cold grin on his lips, also enjoying himself now. "I decided to keep count, Leo—with this fellow."

"Just like I had only two Scotches," Leo said. "Which makes it, the way I figure, two twenty and three dollars. That's all we're giving."

The bartender, glancing at Shanahan, moistened his lips nervously.

"Wait a minute," he said. "I served you eight drinks."

"No, you didn't," Leo said, also glancing at Shanahan with calm and icy blue eyes. "Ask Gimpy there. How many drinks he give us, Gimpy?"

"I'd say eight," Shanahan replied quietly. With the bartender, it had been Leo against something or other; with Shanahan, Shanahan discovered suddenly, it was necessary to be man against man. "You owe him ten bucks, Loudmouth."

"Loudmouth?" Leo repeated softly, moving forward two steps.

"Like in Baldy," Shanahan said, but not because of the bartender. He felt a sudden thick violence in him—to hurt someone or other, to hurt coldly and cruelly. As a young man he had boxed in

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the Golden Gloves for two years and was not worried at all, even with his bad leg. Leo had quite a potbelly on him. "Like in Gimpy. See what I mean, Loudmouth?"

"Now that ain't good manners," Leo said, even more softly, moving forward another two steps. "Might decide to teach you a few, Gimpy."

"Yes, I know," Shanahan said, getting up from the stool. "One difficulty, though. The way you act, I don't think you could, Loudmouth."

"I don't want any roughhouse in here," the bartender said anxiously. "Just cut it out now or I'll call the troopers."

"Wow," Leo said, shifting to him. "Think of that. Sends kind of a cold shudder all through me, Charley. Hear what he said?"

"Come on, come on," the gray one put in impatiently. "Give him the ten, Leo. We got things to do."

"Yeah, guess we have," Leo said. "I'm coming. Your lucky night, Gimpy. Ain't got the time."

When the door had closed on them, the bartender let out a long shaky breath, wiped his face with the bottom of his apron, and moved down to Shanahan.

"Come up here about two or three times a month," Shanahan was told. "Both of them—and they're always like that. Hellbent for trouble, or at least the redhead. But they're good customers this time of year. Pay me twenty-five dollars a night for the room. Always trying to chisel me on the drinks, though. Think it's funny, I guess. But what can I do?"

"I suppose nothing much," Shanahan said—Shanahan the onlooker. "What do you think they come up here for?"

The bartender used his cloth around Shanahan's glass, and looking over toward the front door lowered his voice cautiously.

"I couldn't tell you that," he said. "But they're always here only for the one night. And you know"—polishing needlessly still—"from what I hear they're running a lot of stuff into the states from Montreal these days. Sneak it over the border first, then somebody picks it up along the line and pays them off for it. But I don't know, mister, and I ain't opening my mouth about it. If I did, I'd wake up some morning and find this whole place burned down to the ground. That's what they do, I hear, fellows like them. Better not take a chance."

"Stuff?" Shanahan said. He felt a small nerve jump in one side of his face, then tighten. There were two other men he could re-

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member and they had turned out to be a couple of drug addicts desperate for a fix. "What's that mean?"

"Have to guess," the bartender said, a feeble kind of hatred showing itself in his words for Leo and Charley. "And I don't want to. But they're even getting the high-school kids onto it up here. Had a case in town only last week. High-school girl named Christina Cawley. Only sixteen years old."

Shanahan felt the nerves in his chest tighten. Who or what had killed another Christina that night? The men or the stuff?

"What's the matter?" the bartender said. "You look funny."

"No, I'm all right," Shanahan heard himself say. "Just the leg, I guess. Gives me a twinge every so often. But you've figured out all this for yourself and you don't do a damned thing, even after that high-school kid?"

"Don't look for trouble," the bartender admitted. "Can't afford to. And what do I know, anyway? What can I prove? Look out for yourself, mister, and keep your mouth shut. That's the only answer there is."

And it was the same answer, Shanahan realized later after unpacking his things in the motel room, that he himself had decided on back there at the rest stop. The stuff then was run in here from Canada, paid for in cold cash somewhere, and brought downstate the next day by people like Leo and Charley. There it was put out on the street at high prices, and to afford those prices two men on a certain night in New York had slipped out of a dark cellarway and gone after a girl's purse when she came in with no escort.

Not sane; not normal; like rabid animals. A Christina Shanahan down there and a Christina Cawley up here—but two victims, in different ways, of the same thing. And what was Detective Shanahan going to do about it? Nothing at all. He had closed his door and had vowed never to open it again, not for anyone. Only Number One from now on.

Yet a bit later, on his way to the only restaurant in town, he could not seem to get Leo and Charley out of his mind. Mountain cold and loneliness all around; more bright stars in the sky than he had ever seen, but distant and unreachable stars; and far off somewhere, or so one was told, a Being who let things happen in whatever way they might. Unless someone or other took a hand in the business; unless that was maybe the whole point. Not me to do it. You to do it. One Christina dead and buried now, gone

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forever—but another Christina, only sixteen years old, alive and victimized.

And too there were cold and loneliness, grief and squalor and misery everywhere in the world. So Detective Shanahan discovered that he had been a little mistaken. He had not just found out. He had known it the whole time. But a few weeks ago he had been able to close his door to it, to shelter himself. No matter the wretched and inescapable loneliness then, no matter the misery without end, Detective Shanahan had found a way of moving aside from it, of dismissing it.

Before, always and always, there had been a lamp on for him in a certain apartment, and always and always Christina waiting. A Protestant girl too, and Detective Shanahan a Roman, although the difference in religion had never mattered to them, and they had never so much as discussed it. But she had believed in something much more than Detective Shanahan had. She had always kept the Book of Common Prayer on her bedside table and had not liked it at all when Detective Shanahan would thoughtlessly joke about it. She had never hated anyone, but instead had loved every small, gentle, innocent, helpless thing—a stray kitten, a mangy cur, and the two goldfish he had bought her last April when she had a cold—the first present he had ever bought her.

"And don't worry about them at all," Detective Shanahan had told her. "If we have to go away for a few days we'll just stick them into the freezer, Chris. Then all we have to do is take them out again and in half an hour they'll be swimming around lively as ever. Guarantee it to you. The clerk told me."

And after that? After that, Detective Shanahan remembered, a high and irrepressible happy laugh was his reward, and for Detective Shanahan there had never been another laugh like that one and never would be. Would he hear it now, however, this new Detective Shanahan? He had turned his face away from the world.

"Oh, Dick," he could remember now. "I declare I don't know what's the matter with you, talking like an atheist the way you do. Because you have to believe in the Lord, and if you don't—"

He did not know what he ate, or if he ate anything at all, and was lighting a cigarette over his coffee when Leo and Charley came in. Charley, even paler and jerkier now in his gray ensemble, was carrying a blue and white overnight bag. He put it down under the coatrack near the door. Then he and Leo went into one of the booths, out of sight, and not long after, two other men came

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in. One was also carrying a blue and white bag, and he put it down under the coatrack next to Charley's.

"More coffee?" the waitress asked.

"What?" Shanahan said, watching the two bags. "Oh. Yes, I guess I will. Thanks." So the exchange would be made right here, where two men in one booth and two in a corner would not appear even to know each other. Not a bad way at all. Who would notice or suspect anything in a public restaurant? The two parties would not trust each other so much as an inch, if the bartender knew what he was talking about. The ones from downstate would want to make sure first they were getting the stuff, and the ones from Canada would want to make just as sure they were getting the money. Wait and see then; nice and easy now. Just watch how they handled it.

And they handled it very well, Detective Shanahan saw. In a few minutes Charley reappeared from the booth and went into the men's room, the door of which was visible to Shanahan. Then, seconds later, one of the other men got up, took his bag from under the coatrack, and followed.

Detective Shanahan could not see through the door, but he did not have to by now. In the men's room, he knew, business was being transacted—and private as the grave in there, with the door locked, while Leo and the other man from Canada, probably the bodyguards, remained alertly on watch outside to make sure that neither party pulled anything.

In the men's room it would be Charley's duty to see first, to look, taste, smell, and make sure. Then he would come out with the bag that the other party had brought down from Canada and then it would be Leo's turn to go into the men's room with the money that had been brought up from New York. All the details of the switch had been very carefully thought out. Not until each side was positive it had got what it was bargaining for would they separate, still complete strangers, and go off in different directions.

And so it proved out. Soon Leo went into the men's room carrying his overnight bag and the other man from Canada went in right after him. At that point Detective Shanahan got up from the table, paid his bill, and posted himself just outside the front door in the shadow of an old pickup truck. Presently the second pair of men emerged and drove off in a green Buick with Quebec license plates: point one for the bartender.

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Still watching the door, Detective Shanahan edged back into a phone booth beside the road.

"Troopers' barracks," a voice said when his call had got through. "Sergeant Moore speaking. Yeah, what's the problem?"

"A little trouble down here at your town diner," Detective Shanahan told him. "I'd send a car, Sergeant. And there's a green Buick that just headed north for Canada about two minutes ago. I'd have it stopped somewhere along the line or else at the Canadian border. Two people in it. Male Caucasians, medium height, dark overcoats, thirty or thirty-two. They're carrying a blue and white overnight bag that probably has fifty or a hundred thousand dollars in it, maybe more. The way I see it, they just made a drug deal with two other fellows right here in the diner. Don't waste any time, eh?"

He added the Quebec license number and slipped back to the pickup truck. But now, with everything satisfactorily concluded and nothing more to worry about, Charley and Leo stayed inside for some time, relaxing over their after-dinner coffee. It did not matter very much. Detective Shanahan waited.

A clear cold night still; all those bright mountain stars in the sky; but no lamp on any more, nowhere in the whole world. Yet what really had changed for him, if he refused to let it change? It was only necessary to love now in a different way, and without the silly human failings of meanness and touchiness and self-pride; the thing reduced and clarified for him to its true essence.

That was how his father must have felt when Shanahan's mother had died, because in going through some papers one day, after his father's death, Shanahan had found a picture of his mother as a young girl, with a few lines of poetry attached.

"Go slowly, love, since you have gone before me,
God's creature now, bright spirit swift as flame,
But slowly, love, to sooner hear behind thee,
When I have come, the whisper of your name."

A faith there, certainly. But a foolish and cowardly faith, trying to pretend to itself, trying to avoid the brutal and inescapable human fact? Detective Shanahan decided not for him, anyway. And yet he was still waiting, everything decided for him now in a new way, when Leo and Charley came out. Leo was carrying the blue and white overnight bag. Charley led the way to their car. He had bent down to unlock the door when Detective Shanahan moved toward him out of the shadow.

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"Right there," Detective Shanahan said, his service revolver steady as a rock in his right hand. "Both of you. And put that bag down real slow and real easy, Leo. I want to see what you're carrying around in it."

Yet he made one mistake. He had assumed Leo was the bodyguard. He had not considered it might be Charley, and Charley, at the critical moment, reacted quick as a flash.

But not quick enough. Shanahan had his gun out, Charley did not. So Shanahan placed his first bullet exactly where he wanted to place it, shattering Charley's right arm, but in doing so Leo was able to take the only chance he had left.

"Because you ask me?" Leo said, still holding the bag. "Like hell. Real bright boy, eh?"

"Maybe brighter than you," Shanahan said. "Do what I say."

"Okay," Leo said. "Whatever you say. All we got in here—"

Then he threw the bag at Shanahan's face and came after it, his lips snarling and both arms curved wide to grab Shanahan's legs. But then the choked-off violence finally released itself in Detective Shanahan, and now, very calm in all this, he knocked the bag to one side and decided thankfully that he did not have to use the gun on Leo.

Instead he moved in at Leo just as fast as Leo moved at him. He did not go for the legs, however. He threw just one left hook, always his best punch in those long-ago amateur days, and no other was necessary.

Leo met it head on, stupid Leo; twice the force, consequently. He went down. Charley, clutching his right arm with his left hand, scrambled out from behind the car fender to regain his revolver, but Detective Shanahan kicked it away from him and looked down at them. Leo lay sprawled on his face, arms still curved. He did not move. The overnight bag had come to a stop on Shanahan's left and lay there.

There was not much to do after that. Leo still did not move. Charley had begun to whimper brokenly. Detective Shanahan moved back, at the same time imagining he felt a breath on his face that he would have known among twenty million others. *All right now,* Detective Shanahan thought; *but go slow, Chris, and don't worry about the old boy any more. I think he'll do fine.*

A frightened head stuck itself out of the diner. More heads followed. But not long afterward, at the nearest Northway exit, they could all hear the siren coming.

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a *NEW* Ehrengraf story by

LAWRENCE BLOCK

With this story Martin H. Ehrengraf, the lineal legal descendant of Melville Davisson Post's Randolph Mason, becomes a series character, and we will be hearing more of him in issues to come. But which way will he develop as a character? Will he become "more a detective than a criminal lawyer"? Or "more a criminal lawyer than a detective"? Either way it's a pleasure to watch Ehrengraf at work—but it is what Ehrengraf does offstage, unseen and unheard (but easily inferred), that indicates the man's true criminological career . . .

THE EHRENGRAF PRESUMPTION

by LAWRENCE BLOCK

"Now let me get this straight," Alvin Gort said. "You actually accept criminal cases on a contingency basis. Even homicide cases."

"Especially homicide cases."

"If your client is acquitted he pays your fee. If he's found guilty, then your efforts on his behalf cost him nothing whatsoever. Except expenses, I assume."

"That's very nearly true," Martin Ehrengraf said. The little lawyer supplied a smile which blossomed briefly on his thin lips while leaving his eyes quite uninvolved. "Shall I explain in detail?"

"By all means."

"To take your last point first, I pay my own expenses and furnish no accounting of them to my client. My fees are thus all-inclusive. By the same token, should a client of mine be convicted he would owe me nothing. I would absorb such expenses as I might incur acting on his behalf."

"That's remarkable."

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"It's surely unusual, if not unique. Now the rest of what you've said is essentially true. It's not uncommon for attorneys to take on negligence cases on a contingency basis, participating handsomely in the settlement when they win, sharing their clients' losses when they do not. The principle has always made eminent good sense to me. Why shouldn't a client give substantial value for value received? Why should he be simply charged for service, whether or not the service does him any good? When I pay out money, Mr. Gort, I like to get what I pay for. And I don't mind paying for what I get."

"It certainly makes sense to me," Alvin Gort said. He dug a cigarette from the pack in his shirt pocket, scratched a match, drew smoke into his lungs. This was his first experience in a jail cell and he'd been quite surprised to learn that he was allowed to have matches on his person, to wear his own clothes rather than prison garb, to keep money in his pocket and a watch on his wrist.

No doubt all this would change if he were convicted of murdering his wife. Then he'd be in an actual prison and the rules would most likely be more severe. Here they had taken his belt as a precaution against suicide, and they would have taken the laces from his shoes had he not been wearing loafers at the time of his arrest. But it could have been worse.

And unless Martin Ehrengraf pulled off a small miracle, it would be worse.

"Sometimes my clients never see the inside of a courtroom," Ehrengraf was saying now. "I'm always happiest when I can save my clients not merely from prison but from going to trial in the first place. So you should understand that whether or not I collect my fee hinges on your fate, on the disposition of your case—and not on how much work I put in or how much time it takes me to liberate you. In other words, from the moment you retain me I have an interest in your future, and the moment you are released and all charges dropped, my fee becomes due and payable in full."

"And your fee will be—?"

"One hundred thousand dollars," Ehrengraf said crisply.

Alvin Gort considered the sum, then nodded thoughtfully. It was not difficult to believe that the diminutive attorney commanded and received large fees. Alvin Gort recognized good clothing when he saw it, and the clothing Martin Ehrengraf wore was good indeed. The man was well turned out. His suit, a bronze

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sharkskin number with a nipped-in waist, was clearly not off the rack. His brown wing-tip shoes had been polished to a high gloss. His tie, a rich teak in hue with an unobtrusive below-the-knot design, bore the reasonably discreet trademark of a genuine countess. And his hair had received the attention of a good barber while his neatly trimmed mustache served as a focal point for a face otherwise devoid of any single dominating feature. The overall impression thus created was one of a man who could announce a six-figure fee and make you feel that such a sum was altogether fitting and proper.

"I'm reasonably well off," Gort said.

"I know. It's a commendable quality in clients."

"And I'd certainly be glad to pay one hundred thousand dollars for my freedom. On the other hand, if you don't get me off then I don't owe you a dime. Is that right?"

"Quite right."

Gort considered again, nodded again. "Then I've got no reservations," he said. "But—"

"Yes?"

Alvin Gort's eyes measured the lawyer. Gort was accustomed to making rapid decisions. He made one now.

"*You* might have reservations," he said. "There's one problem."

"Oh?"

"I did it," Gort said. "I killed her."

"I can see how you would think that," Martin Ehrengraf said. "The weight of circumstantial evidence piled up against you. Long-suppressed unconscious resentment of your wife, perhaps even a hidden desire to see her dead. All manner of guilt feelings stored up since early childhood. Plus, of course, the natural idea that things do not happen without a good reason for their occurrence. You are in prison, charged with murder; therefore it stands to reason that you did something to deserve all this, that you did in fact murder your wife."

"But I did," Gort said.

"Nonsense. Palpable nonsense."

"But I was there," Gort said. "I'm not making this up. For God's sake, man, I'm not a psychiatric basket case. Unless you're thinking about an insanity defense? I suppose I could go along with that, scream out hysterically in the middle of the night, strip

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naked and sit gibbering in the corner of my cell. I can't say I'd enjoy it but I'll go along with it if you think that's the answer. But—"

"Don't be ridiculous," Ehrengraf said, wrinkling his nose with distaste. "I mean to get you acquitted, Mr. Gort. Not committed to an asylum."

"I don't understand," Gort said. He frowned, looked around craftily. "You think the place is bugged," he whispered. "That's it, eh?"

"You can use your normal tone of voice. No, they don't employ hidden microphones in this jail. It's not only illegal but against policy as well."

"Then I don't understand. Look, I'm the guy who fastened the dynamite under the hood of Ginnie's Pontiac. I hooked up a cable to the starter. I set things up so that she would be blown into the next world. Now how do you propose to—"

"Mr. Gort." Ehrengraf held up a hand like a stop sign. "Please, Mr. Gort."

Alvin Gort subsided.

"Mr. Gort," Ehrengraf continued, "I defend the innocent and leave it to more clever men than myself to employ trickery in the cause of the guilty. And I find this very easy to do because all my clients are innocent. There is, you know, a legal principle involved."

"A legal principle?"

"The presumption of innocence."

"The presumption of—? Oh, you mean a man is presumed innocent until proved guilty."

"A tenet of Anglo-Saxon jurisprudence," Ehrengraf said. "The French presume guilt until innocence is proven. And the totalitarian countries, of course, presume guilt and do not *allow* innocence to be proved, taking it for granted that their police would not dream of wasting their time arresting the innocent in the first place. But I refer, Mr. Gort, to something more far-reaching than the legal presumption of innocence." Ehrengraf drew himself up to his full height, such as it was, and his back went ramrod-straight. "I refer," he said, "to the Ehrengraf Presumption."

"The Ehrengraf Presumption?"

"Any client of Martin H. Ehrengraf," said Martin Ehrengraf, "is presumed by Ehrengraf to be innocent, which presumption is invariably confirmed in due course, the preconceptions of the client

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himself notwithstanding." The little lawyer smiled with his lips. "Now," he said, "shall we get down to business?"

Half an hour later Alvin Gort was still sitting on the edge of his cot. Martin Ehrengraf, however, was pacing briskly in the manner of a caged lion. With the thumb and forefinger of his right hand he smoothed the ends of his neat mustache. His left hand was at his side, its thumb hooked into his trouser pocket. He continued to pace while Gort smoked a cigarette almost to the filter. Then, as Gort ground the butt under his heel, Ehrengraf turned on his own heel and fixed his eyes on his client.

"The evidence is damning," he conceded. "A man of your description purchased dynamite and blasting caps from Tattersall Demolition Supply just ten days before your wife's death. Your signature is on the purchase order. A clerk remembers waiting on you and reports that you were nervous."

"Damn right I was nervous," Gort said. "I never killed anyone before."

"Please, Mr. Gort. If you must maintain the facade of having committed murder, at least keep your illusion to yourself. Don't share it with me. At the moment I'm concerned with evidence. We have your signature on the purchase order and we have you identified by the clerk. The man even remembers what you were wearing. Most customers come to Tattersall in work clothes, it would seem, while you wore a rather distinctive burgundy blazer and white flannel slacks. And tasseled loafers," he added, clearly not approving of them.

"It's hard to find casual loafers without tassels or braid these days."

"Hard, yes. But scarcely impossible. Now you say your wife had a lover—a Mr. Barry Lattimore."

"That toad Lattimore!"

"You knew of this affair and disapproved."

"Disapproved! I hated them. I wanted to strangle both of them. I wanted—"

"*Please,* Mr. Gort."

"I'm sorry."

Ehrengraf sighed. "Now your wife seems to have written a letter to her sister in New Mexico. She did in fact have a sister in New Mexico?"

"Her sister Grace. In Socorro."

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"She posted the letter four days before her death. In it she stated that you knew about her affair with Lattimore."

"I'd known for weeks."

"She went on to say that she feared for her life. 'The situation is deteriorating and I don't know what to do. You know what a temper he has. I'm afraid he might be capable of anything, anything at all. I'm defenseless and I don't know what to do.' "

"Defenseless as a cobra," Gort muttered.

"No doubt. That was from memory but it's a fair approximation. Of course I'll have to examine the original. And I'll want specimens of your wife's handwriting."

"You can't think the letter's a forgery?"

"We never know, do we? But I'm sure you can tell me where I can get hold of samples. Now what other evidence do we have to contend with? There was a neighbor who saw you doing something under the hood of your wife's car some four or five hours before her death."

"Mrs. Boerland. Damned old crone. Vicious gossiping busybody."

"You seem to have been in the garage shortly before dawn. You had a light on and the garage door was open, and you had the hood of the car up and were doing something."

"Damned right I was doing something. I was—"

"Please, Mr. Gort. Between tasseled loafers and these constant interjections—"

"Won't happen again, Mr. Ehrengraf."

"Yes. Now just let me see. There were two cars in the garage, were there not? Your Buick and your wife's Pontiac. Your car was parked on the left-hand side, your wife's on the right."

"That was so that she could back straight out. When you're parked on the left side you have to back out in a sort of squiggly way. When Ginnie tried to do that she always ran over a corner of the lawn."

"Ah."

"Some people just don't give a damn about a lawn," Gort said, "and some people do."

"As with so many aspects of human endeavor, Mr. Gort. Now Mrs. Boerland observed you in the garage shortly before dawn, and the actual explosion which claimed your wife's life took place a few hours later while you were having your breakfast."

"Toasted English muffin and coffee. Years ago Ginnie made

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scrambled eggs and squeezed fresh orange juice for me. But with the passage of time—"

"Did she normally start her car at that hour?"

"No," Gort said. He sat up straight, frowned. "No, of course not. Dammit, why didn't *I* think of that? I figured she'd sit around the house until noon. I wanted to be well away from the place when it happened—"

"Mr. Gort."

"Well, I did. And all of a sudden there was this shock wave and a thunderclap right on top of it and I'll tell you, Mr. Ehrengraf, I didn't even know what it was."

"Of course you didn't."

"I mean—"

"I wonder why your wife left the house at that hour. She said nothing to you?"

"No. There was a phone call and—"

"From whom?"

Gort frowned again. "Damned if I know. But she got the call just before she left. I wonder if there's a connection."

"I shouldn't doubt it." Ehrengraf continued to probe, then he asked who inherited Virginia Gort's money.

"Money?" Gort grinned. "Ginnie didn't have a dime. I was her legal heir just as she was mine, but I was the one who had the money. All she left was the jewelry and clothing that my money paid for."

"Any insurance?"

"Exactly enough to pay your fee," Gort said, and grinned this time rather like a shark. "Except that I won't see a penny of it. Fifty thousand dollars, double indemnity for accidental death, and I think the insurance companies call murder an accident, although it's always struck me as rather purposeful. That makes one hundred thousand dollars, your fee to the penny, but none of it'll come my way."

"It's true that one cannot profit financially from a crime," Ehrengraf said. "But if you're found innocent—"

Gort shook his head. "Doesn't make any difference," he said. "I just learned this the other day. About the same time I was buying the dynamite, she was changing her beneficiary. The change went through in plenty of time. The whole hundred thousand goes to that rotter Lattimore."

"Now that," said Martin Ehrengraf, "is very interesting.". . .

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Two weeks and three days later Alvin Gort sat in a surprisingly comfortable straight-backed chair in Martin Ehrengraf's exceptionally cluttered office. He balanced a checkbook on his knee and carefully made out a check. The fountain pen he used had cost him $65. The lawyer's services, for which the check he was writing represented payment in full, had cost him considerably more, yet Gort, a good judge of value, thought Ehrengraf's fee a bargain and the pen overpriced.

"One hundred thousand dollars," he said, waving the check in the air to dry its ink. "I've put today's date on it but I'll ask you to hold it until Monday morning before depositing it. I've instructed my broker to sell securities and transfer funds to my checking account. I don't normally maintain a balance sufficient to cover a check of this size."

"That's understandable."

"I'm glad something is. Because I'm damned if I can understand how you got me off the hook."

Ehrengraf allowed himself a smile. "My greatest obstacle was your own mental attitude," he said. "You honestly believed yourself to be guilty of your wife's death, didn't you?"

"But—"

"Ah, my dear Mr. Gort. You see, I *knew* you were innocent. The Ehrengraf Presumption assured me of that. I merely had to look for someone with the right sort of motive, and who should emerge but Mr. Barry Lattimore, your wife's lover and beneficiary, a man with a need for money and a man whose affair with your wife was reaching crisis proportions.

"It was clear to me that you were not the sort of man to commit murder in such an obvious fashion. Buying the dynamite openly, signing the purchase order with your own name—my dear Mr. Gort, you would never behave so foolishly! No, you had to have been framed, and clearly Lattimore was the man who had reason to frame you."

"And then they found things," Gort said.

"Indeed they did, once I was able to tell them where to look. Extraordinary what turned up! You would think Lattimore would have had the sense to get rid of all that, wouldn't you? But no, a burgundy blazer and a pair of white slacks, a costume identical to your own but tailored to Mr. Lattimore's frame, hung in the very back of his clothes closet. And in a drawer of his desk the police found half a dozen sheets of paper on which he'd practised your

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signature until he was able to do quite a creditable job of writing it. By dressing like you and signing your name to the purchase order, he quite neatly put your neck in the noose."

"Incredible."

"He even copied your tasseled loafers. The police found a pair in his closet, and of course the man never habitually wore loafers of any sort. Of course he denied ever having seen the shoes before. Or the jacket, or the slacks, and of course he denied having practised your signature."

Gort's eyes went involuntarily to Ehrengraf's own shoes. This time the lawyer was wearing black wing tips. His suit was dove-gray and somewhat more sedately tailored than the brown one Gort had seen previously. His tie was maroon, his cuff links simple gold hexagons. The precision of Ehrengraf's dress and carriage contrasted sharply with the disarray of his office.

"And that letter from your wife to her sister Grace," Ehrengraf continued. "It turned out to be authentic, as it happens, but it also proved to be open to a second interpretation. The man of whom Virginia was afraid was never named, and a thoughtful reading showed he could as easily have been Lattimore as you. And then of course a second letter to Grace was found among your wife's effects. She evidently wrote it the night before her death and never had a chance to mail it. It's positively damning. She tells her sister how she changed the beneficiary of her insurance at Lattimore's insistence, how your knowledge of the affair was making Lattimore irrational and dangerous, and how she couldn't avoid the feeling that he planned to kill her. She goes on to say that she intended to change her insurance again, making Grace the beneficiary, and that she would so inform Lattimore in order to remove any financial motive for her murder.

"But even as she was writing those lines, he was preparing to put the dynamite in her car."

Ehrengraf went on explaining and Gort could only stare at him in wonder. Was it possible that his own memory could have departed so utterly from reality? Had the twin shocks of Ginnie's death and of arrest have caused him to fabricate a whole set of false memories?

Damn it, he *remembered* buying that dynamite! He *remembered* wiring it under the hood of her Pontiac! So how on earth—

The Ehrengraf Presumption, he thought. If Ehrengraf could presume Gort's innocence the way he did, why couldn't Gort pre-

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sume his own innocence? Why not give himself the benefit of the doubt?

Because the alternative was terrifying. The letter, the practise sheets of his signature, the shoes and slacks and burgundy blazer—

"Mr. Gort? Are you all right?"

"I'm fine," Gort said.

"You looked pale for a moment. The strain, no doubt. Will you take a glass of water?"

"No, I don't think so." Gort lit a cigarette, inhaled deeply. "I'm fine," he said. "I feel good about everything. You know, not only am I in the clear but ultimately I don't think your fee will cost me anything."

"Oh?"

"Not if that rotter killed her. Lattimore can't profit from a murder he committed. And while she may have intended to make Grace her beneficiary, her unfulfilled intent has no legal weight. So her estate becomes the beneficiary of the insurance policy, and she never did get around to changing her will, so that means the money will wind up in my hands. Amazing, isn't it?"

"Amazing." The little lawyer rubbed his hands together briskly. "But you do know what they say about unhatched chickens, Mr. Gort. Mr. Lattimore hasn't been convicted of anything yet."

"You think he's got a chance of getting off?"

"That would depend," said Martin Ehrengraf, "on his choice of attorney."

This time Ehrengraf's suit was navy blue with a barely perceptible stripe in a lighter blue. His shirt, as usual, was white. His shoes were black loafers—no tassels or braid—and his tie had a half-inch stripe of royal blue flanked by two narrower stripes, one of gold and the other of a rather bright green, all on a navy field. The necktie was that of the Caedmon Society of Oxford University, an organization of which Mr. Ehrengraf was not a member. The tie was a souvenir of another case and the lawyer wore it now and then on especially auspicious occasions.

Such as this visit to the cell of Barry Pierce Lattimore.

"I'm innocent," Lattimore said. "But it's gotten to the point where I don't expect anyone to believe me. There's so much evidence against me."

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"Circumstantial evidence."

"Yes, but that's often enough to hang a man, isn't it?" Lattimore winced at the thought. "I loved Ginnie. I wanted to marry her. I never even thought of killing her."

"I believe you."

"You do?"

Ehrengraf nodded solemnly. "Indeed I do," he said. "Otherwise I wouldn't be here. I only collect fees when I get results, Mr. Lattimore. If I can't get you acquitted of all charges, then I won't take a penny for my trouble."

"That's unusual, isn't it?"

"It is."

"My own lawyer thinks I'm crazy to hire you. He had several criminal lawyers he was prepared to recommend. But I know a little about you. I know you get results. And since I *am* innocent, I feel I want to be represented by someone with a vested interest in getting me free."

"Of course my fees are high, Mr. Lattimore."

"Well, there's a problem. I'm not a rich man."

"You're the beneficiary of a hundred-thousand-dollars insurance policy."

"But I can't collect that money."

"You can if you're found innocent."

"Oh," Lattimore said. "Oh."

"And otherwise you'll owe me nothing."

"Then I can't lose, can I?"

"So it would seem," Ehrengraf said. "Now shall we begin? It's quite clear you were framed, Mr. Lattimore. That blazer and those trousers did not find their way to your closet of their own accord. Those shoes did not walk in by themselves. The two letters to Mrs. Gort's sister, one mailed and one unmailed, must have been part of the scheme. Someone constructed an elaborate frameup, Mr. Lattimore, with the object of implicating first Mr. Gort and then yourself. Now let's determine who would have a motive."

"Gort," said Lattimore.

"I think not."

"Who else? He had a reason to kill her. And he hated me, so who would have more reason to—"

"Mr. Lattimore, I'm afraid that's not a possibility. You see, Mr. Gort was a client of mine."

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"Oh. Yes, I forgot."

"And I'm personally convinced of his innocence."

"I see."

"Just as I'm convinced of yours."

"I see."

"Now who else would have a motive? Was Mrs. Gort emotionally involved with anyone else? Did she have another lover? Had she had any other lovers before you came into the picture? And how about Mr. Gort? A former mistress who might have had a grudge against both him and his wife? Hmmm?" Ehrengraf smoothed the ends of his mustache. "Or perhaps, just perhaps, there was an elaborate plot hatched by *Mrs.* Gort."

"Ginnie?"

"It's not impossible. I'm afraid I reject the possibility of suicide. It's always tempting but in this instance I fear it just won't wash. But let's suppose, let's merely suppose, that Mrs. Gort decided to murder her husband and implicate you."

"Why would she do that?"

"I've no idea. But suppose she did, and suppose she intended to get her husband to drive her car and arranged the dynamite accordingly, and then when she left the house so hurriedly she forgot what she'd done, and of course the moment she turned the key in the ignition it all came back to her in a rather dramatic way."

"But I can't believe—"

"Oh, Mr. Lattimore, we believe what it pleases us to believe, don't you agree? The important thing is to recognize that you are innocent and to act on that recognition."

"But how can you be absolutely certain of my innocence?"

Martin Ehrengraf permitted himself a smile. "Mr. Lattimore," he said, "let me tell you about a principle of mine. I call it the Ehrengraf Presumption."

"Q"

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a *NEW* Captain Leopold story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

A health spa is perhaps a microcosm of the contemporary world. There are obvious points of similarity and comparison, and many common symbols—and possibly one lesson to be learned: these days only the strong, the unscrupulous, survive . . . Join Captain Leopold at Dr. Rohmer's Health Spa—that is, join him if you can. The question is: Who is Captain Leopold?

CAPTAIN LEOPOLD INCOGNITO

by *EDWARD D. HOCH*

It was Fletcher's case in the beginning, and oddly enough that was how it became Leopold's case. "He knows me too well," Lieutenant Fletcher said, taking a sip of coffee from his paper cup. "There's no way I could follow him up there undercover."

Connie Trent, full of department spirit after her recent promotion to sergeant, volunteered, "I could go in his place, Captain."

Leopold smiled. "To a men's health spa? I don't believe you'd stay undercover very long, Connie."

"Don't they have women there too?"

Fletcher shook his head. "Not in the spring. At Dr. Rohmer's it's strictly men now. In the summer they have women's sessions and even coed ones, but now it's men only."

Connie thought about it. "What you need is a cop who looks like he could use a week at Dr. Rohmer's Health Spa. Not some young guy with muscles. You need one who's middle-aged and overweight."

Captain Leopold smiled. "You've just described me, Connie."

"You!"

"Why not? I don't have any pending cases here, and best of all Walter Hazard is new to this city and doesn't know me. Call the

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spa and see if they'll take me without an advance reservation. I can go up there tomorrow. And contact the sheriff's office up there. I'll need them to make the actual arrest."

Fletcher wasn't happy. "It's my case, Captain. You shouldn't be taking the risk for me."

"It's the department's case, Fletcher."

The object of all this discussion, Walter Hazard, was a 41-year-old man with a long record of dealing in narcotics. He'd come to Leopold's city only recently, apparently intent on taking over the heroin trade from a man named Max Guttner, who controlled the drug traffic throughout southern New England.

Max Guttner had died ten days ago, shot twice in the head by a silenced .22-caliber target pistol. It was a weapon becoming more and more popular in criminal circles because it could be effectively silenced. And at close range it was just as deadly as a .45. Fletcher was convinced Hazard had killed Guttner to get control of the heroin traffic, but knowing it and proving it were two different things. They needed the murder weapon. And they needed proof that Hazard was now in charge of the Guttner operation. Fletcher hoped to find that proof at Dr. Rohmer's Health Spa.

The spa, located in northern Vermont near the Canadian border, had long been rumored as a way station in the narcotics pipeline from Canada. Respectable businessmen, relaxing for a week in the Vermont woods, returned with their suitcases full of heroin. "We could stop Hazard on the way back," Connie suggested, but Fletcher vetoed it.

"He'd be clean. He knows all the tricks. He has to be taken at the moment he gets the stuff in his hands. And the only way to do that is with an undercover man. We can hold him on the drug charge and use it as evidence he'd taken over Guttner's organization. That'll give us our motive for the killing."

"All right," Leopold said. "I can use a week up there. What about this man Rohmer who runs the place?"

"It seems he must be involved, though we've got nothing against him."

"Is Hazard there now?"

Fletcher nodded. "He went up last night."

"Today's Monday. If he's staying a full week, chances are the delivery will be made on Thursday or Friday. But I'd better get up there tomorrow, just in case."

"What name will you use?" Connie asked.

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"I'll think of a good one."

Walter Hazard arose early Tuesday morning for a brisk run in the woods before breakfast. He was ready to admit there was something to this health spa business, even after only one full day on the premises. A combination of exercise, diet, and steam room had already shown results. It was almost enough to make him forget the reason for his trip.

Hazard had driven up from Connecticut on Sunday night. Dr. Rohmer told him that most clients came by train, but Hazard would have a special need for his car on the return trip. The plan was for a man named Kellogg to cross the border with fifty pounds of uncut heroin on Thursday night. He was expecting to meet Max Guttner, but the word had been passed to him that he'd be meeting Walter Hazard instead.

Hazard was a man without morals, which he insisted was the only way to get ahead in the modern world. He never thought about what happened to the heroin after it left his hands, and he never thought about the men he'd killed along the way to his present position. It hadn't bothered his conscience a bit when he'd walked up behind Max Guttner and fired two bullets into his head at close range. It was the way of the world these days. Only the strong, the unscrupulous, survived.

Hazard had a woman named Margo who'd been with him for the past two years. She was beautiful and smart, and could have succeeded on her own in the business world. Somehow she preferred the uncertainties of Hazard's existence, and he never questioned that. He'd had to leave her behind on this trip, which depressed her, but he'd promised to phone.

In fact he was thinking of phoning her as he completed his run, coming up to the dining-room entrance at a trot. That was when he saw Dr. Rohmer awaiting him. Rohmer was a slim balding man who rarely smiled. At this moment he was looking especially unsmiling. "Can I see you in my office, Mr. Hazard?"

"Now? Before breakfast?"

"Before breakfast."

Hazard wiped the sweat from his face and neck and followed the man inside. "What's up?" he asked when they were alone in the spa's main office. It was after eight and his stomach was growling with hunger.

"I just had a phone call from a friend at the sheriff's office."

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"Oh?"

"Do you know a detective named Leopold? Captain Leopold?"

"I may have heard the name. What about him?"

"He notified the sheriff that he's coming here undercover as part of a murder investigation. He wants their help if an arrest needs to be made, since he's outside his own jurisdiction."

"Was my name mentioned?"

"No—but it's you he's after, isn't it? He knows you killed Max."

Hazard merely stared at Dr. Rohmer. Finally he said, "That sort of talk can get you in big trouble, Doctor. When's this Leopold arriving?"

"Today."

"I'll be watching for him."

"I don't want him here, Hazard. Nor you either!"

"Don't worry. There won't be any trouble. How will he arrive—by car?"

"You're the only one this week who came by car. He'll take the train up from Montpelier like everyone else, to avoid attracting attention."

"How's he get here from the station?"

"Fellow from town named Gus brings up the mail every day. Any strays come along in his station wagon."

"Strays?"

"Those with reservations arrive on Sunday as you did. But there are always a few who turn up later in the week unannounced, and we try to accommodate them if there's room."

"What time does Gus get here?"

"Around eleven if the train's on time."

"All right," Hazard said. "Thanks for the warning."

"Are you clearing out?"

"No. I'm staying."

When Hazard saw the station wagon coming up the hill he left his exercise class and trotted over to the main building. A stocky man in soiled coveralls was unloading suitcases from the back of the vehicle. "Are you Gus?" Hazard asked.

The man straightened up. "That's right, mister."

"Where's the fellow you brought up from the train?"

"Fellow? I brought up three fellows. They're in at the desk, registering."

"Three?" Hazard hurried up the steps and into the lobby. There were indeed three men there—all middle-aged and overweight.

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Typical clients for Dr. Rohmer. One was taller than the others, with white hair and a boyish face. He put out his hand as Hazard entered the lobby.

"Are you Dr. Rohmer? I'm Ed Murray from Boston. I don't have a reservation but I was told on the phone it didn't matter."

Hazard shook hands and said, "Sorry, I'm not the doctor. Just a patient like yourself."

"Oh."

Gus deposited the luggage in the lobby and accepted tips from the men. Then he turned his station wagon around and headed back down the hill. Presently Dr. Rohmer appeared, casting a glance in Hazard's direction, and welcomed the three men. "Our regular week at the $150 rate starts on Sunday. By the day it's $30. If you'll just sign in I'll have one of the boys show you to your rooms."

One of the two shorter men spoke up. "I'm Frank Gibbons, from Springfield. Could you make sure I get an air-conditioned room? I have a bit of an allergy problem, and—"

Dr. Rohmer came close to smiling but didn't quite make it. "You're here to relax and get over things like that. A few sessions in the steam room and some good healthy food and you'll forget you ever had an allergy."

Hazard stole a glance at the registration cards. The third man, well built and probably still in his late forties, was named Sam Young. He gave his home as Providence, Rhode Island, and stood off to one side without speaking.

When they'd been led away to their rooms, Dr. Rohmer came over to Hazard. "Did you look them over?"

"A little. Which one is Leopold?"

The doctor frowned. "I have no idea. I told you I want you out of here."

"Let's go in your office and talk it over."

"There's nothing to talk over." The doctor turned and stalked away.

Hazard watched him go, wondering just how serious he was. If Rohmer did anything to block the transfer of the heroin, he could ruin Hazard's takeover of the Guttner network. Without a leader they'd be selling the stuff on the streets for whatever the market would bring.

Hazard went up to his room and opened his suitcase. From the zipper pouch of toilet articles he extracted his .22-caliber target

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pistol, a box of cartridges, and the silencer. He went about his task with loving care, checking the weapon to make certain it was still well oiled. It was American intelligence agents who'd first discovered that such weapons were just about the only production handguns which could be effectively silenced. The information had taken years to seep through to the underworld, but now the pistol was being used with excellent results.

Hazard loaded the gun and attached the silencer. Then he carefully taped it to the skin of his calf, beneath his baggy sweatpants. He'd lose some hair off his leg when he pulled it free, but that was nothing. A brief bit of pain had never bothered him.

He went back outside, watching some of the early comers already heading for the dining room. It was just about noon, almost lunchtime, but he wasn't the least bit hungry. "Going to eat?" a voice behind him asked. It was the white-haired Ed Murray from Boston.

"Not quite yet," Hazard replied.

"Hurry up and I'll save you a seat at our table." Murray had changed into shorts and a sweatshirt and seemed ready to take on the world.

"Sure," Hazard said. "You do that."

He crossed the exercise field to the administration building and entered Rohmer's office through the side door. The doctor was at his desk, checking over a pile of bills from the morning mail. "What—? Oh, it's you again, Hazard. What now? I thought you'd be gone."

"I'm not going, Rohmer. I can't go till Kellogg gets here Thursday night with the stuff."

Dr. Rohmer sighed and went back to checking the bills. "Kellogg won't be coming. I'm putting through a call to Montreal this afternoon, telling him to cancel the trip."

"I was afraid of that."

"Damn it, Hazard, I'm not going to let this business go down the drain for you! Max Guttner always paid me well, but he respected my position too! I can't have Kellogg coming across the border Thursday night with an undercover detective captain on the premises. Especially when I don't even know which one he is!"

"I'll find out."

"Don't bother—the deal's off. I'm phoning Kellogg."

"I'm sorry to hear that."

Hazard squatted as if to tie his sneaker, pulling the pistol free

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from under his pants leg. He felt the sudden flash of pain as the tape pulled away some hair. Then he straightened up, and without saying a word fired two bullets into Dr. Rohmer's left temple.

There was almost no sound from the pistol, and very little blood from the two small wounds. Hazard quickly stepped to the door and bolted it. Then he lifted Rohmer's body from the chair and half dragged, half carried it across to a closet. It would have to remain there till after dark. He couldn't risk anyone finding it till after Thursday, when he completed his deal. Any hint of Rohmer's murder and Leopold would have the local police in immediately.

Hazard replaced the gun beneath his baggy sweatpants and jogged over to the dining room to join Ed Murray for lunch. The other two newcomers were at the table with him, and they'd saved a chair for Hazard. He wondered who'd had the idea of inviting him. "Sit right here," Murray said. "You come to this place often?"

"First time. How about you?"

"First time for all of us, I guess."

Gibbons, the man from Springfield, patted his bulging stomach. "I been going to these health spas for years, but they sure don't do much for me. This one's a picnic compared to some I've seen. There's a place in the Catskills that's run like a concentration camp, with enforced fasting. That'll take the pounds off!"

"Really?" Hazard sipped his vegetable juice. He turned to the silent Sam Young. "What about you? First visit here?"

"Yeah."

"You don't talk much."

"Nothing to say."

"Only reason I'm here is my wife," the white-haired Murray said. "She's always beefing about the shape I'm in, wanting me to lose weight."

Hazard glanced at Murray's left hand. There was no wedding ring, but that proved nothing. Many men didn't wear them. But Murray said he was from Boston and he talked more like a New Yorker. That might mean something. He tried to put himself in Leopold's place. Would he be more likely to pose as a devoted husband or a health nut like Gibbons or a silent stranger like Sam Young?

The trouble was, Hazard didn't know Leopold.

But someone must know him.

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Someone back in Connecticut.

After lunch Hazard excused himself and went to his little room. He had two phone calls to make.

First he got an outside line and then dialed the number of Dr. Rohmer's Health Spa. When the switchboard answered he asked for the front desk. Then, muffling his voice and trying to imitate Rohmer's monotone, he told the room clerk, "This is Dr. Rohmer. I'm in town and something important has come up. I may have to go down to Burlington for a few days."

"Yes, sir," the clerk answered dutifully.

"Tell the staff to carry on as usual. I'll be back no later than Friday."

"Very good, sir."

Hazard hung up smiling. He knew Rohmer's car was in the garage at his nearby house, but that could be moved after dark, along with the body. Rohmer was separated from his wife, so there'd probably be no one to question his disappearance, at least till Friday. By that time Hazard would have finished his business.

Next he phoned his apartment in Connecticut, hoping Margo would be home. She was.

"How are you doing up there?" she asked. "Losing weight?"

"Some. Look, Margo, I want you to do something for me. I need a photograph of a man named Leopold, a detective captain down there."

"What's up?"

"He may be here. If he is, I need to identify him."

"If he's there, how do I get a picture of him?"

"Go down to the newspaper morgue—right now, this afternoon. If he's a captain he must have had his picture in the paper sometime. When he was promoted, if nothing else. Make a Xerox copy of the clipping. If they won't allow copies, steal the damn thing. Call me back when you've got it. I'll give you the number here."

"All right." She didn't ask any more questions. She knew what he wanted and how to get it. "Take care of yourself, Walter."

"Don't worry."

He hung up and went back outside. It was almost time for the steam room and massage.

The silent Sam Young was on the massage table next to Hazard, and he noticed the scar tissue on Young's side. "What's that from?" he asked. "Looks like a bullet grazed you."

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Sam Young eyed him with interest. "That's what happened."

"Where?"

"Vietnam."

Young closed his eyes and said no more. Hazard rolled over on his stomach and studied the scar. There was no way of telling if it had been caused by a .50-caliber machine gun in the jungle or a .32-caliber handgun in an alley.

It was just before dinnertime when Margo called back. He could tell from the edge of excitement in her voice that she had what he needed. "You got it?"

"Sure, Walter. No problem. There were lots of clippings about him, and two pictures. I copied them both."

"What's he look like?"

"Middle-aged, a little overweight."

"I figured that much. Does he have white hair?"

"No, it looks dark in these pictures."

"How recent are they?"

"One's about three years old, but the other ran six months ago."

"Can you tell how tall he is?"

"Not from these pictures. They're head-and-shoulders."

"Anything in the articles that might help? Do they mention a bullet wound?"

"No, I don't remember anything like that."

Hazard was feeling frustrated. "What about his face? Anything unusual? Scars?"

"Nothing like that, Walter. It's just a face."

"What color eyes?"

"These are black-and-white pictures, Walter. How the hell do I know what color eyes? Not real light, though."

"All right," he said finally.

"Do you want me to drive up with these?"

"No, no—a woman up here this week would be too noticeable. Besides, it's a six-hour drive. Put them in the mail to me—but take the letter to the post office so you're sure it goes out tonight."

"You probably won't get it till Thursday morning."

"I know." He hated putting himself at the mercy of the mail, but maybe he'd get lucky in the meantime. He still held an advantage because Leopold couldn't know when the shipment from Canada was due—if he knew about it at all.

"Be careful, Walter."

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"Don't worry. I'll see you the end of the week."

He hung up, wondering if the phone might be tapped, and then decided it wasn't. The line went through the switchboard. They couldn't have put a tap on it without Rohmer's knowledge.

After dinner he strolled and chatted with Ed Murray, inventing a mythical midwestern business he'd managed to counter Murray's stories about the business world of Boston. As they parted, Hazard reflected that at least Margo's information had cleared the white-haired Murray.

Unless, that is, Leopold had dyed his hair.

After dark Hazard went over to Dr. Rohmer's house and opened the lock on the garage door, using a key from the doctor's pocket. He drove the big green limousine up to the rear entrance of the administration building, hoping no one was looking out a window. He could hear the TV sets blaring, and he knew that Murray and the other two were engaged in a three-handed pinochle game. With luck he'd be safe, but he carried the .22 pistol under his jacket just in case.

He pulled Rohmer's body from the closet, hoisted it over his shoulders, went out to the car, and put it in the trunk. There was a large stain of blood on the closet floor that he covered with a little rug from the office. Then he smoothed out the marks of the dead man's heels on the office carpeting.

Hazard drove the big car slowly down the winding road toward the town. He remembered seeing an abandoned marble quarry on the drive up. It wasn't the perfect place to hide a car and a body, but it should serve for a few days.

He left the car deep in the quarry, placing a few wooden planks and tree branches around it to camouflage its appearance from a distance. Then he walked about a mile into town.

The first person he saw was Gus, standing by his station wagon near the train station. "What'll you charge to run me up the hill to the spa?" he asked.

The stocky man spit out some tobacco juice. "Two bucks."

"Good, let's go."

"You been out walkin'?"

"Exercise. Walked farther than I thought. It's easy downhill, but I guess I need a ride back up."

Gus grunted and opened his door. "Get that dust off your shoes. I try to keep my wagon clean."

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"Sure," Hazard said.

In ten minutes he was back at the health spa. He paid Gus for the trip and went inside to watch the card game. No one seemed to have missed him.

In the morning, on his pre-breakfast run, Hazard was accompanied by Frank Gibbons. The man seemed to have overcome his worry over allergies, but he was still full of horror stories about the other spas he'd visited.

"One place out west," he told Hazard as they jogged along the wooded path, "they all kneel naked in the sun on a stone terrace overlooking the ocean. Men and women together! I tried it for an hour and was sunburned for two weeks!"

"They go for that stuff in California," Hazard agreed. "A bunch of oddballs, if you ask me."

"It cured my allergy though—I gotta admit that."

"How were the women out west?"

"Beautiful! But they were all into this meditation kick. It wasn't a health spa, it was a religion."

The mail arrived a little before noon and was quickly sorted into a row of slots, one for each letter of the alphabet. There was nothing in the H slot for Hazard, but he'd known it was too soon to receive Margo's letter and the pictures.

After lunch he tried to strike up another conversation with Sam Young, but without much luck. He'd just about ruled Young off his list of suspects—certainly Leopold would try harder to be friendly, if only to keep a close eye on him.

That evening he started to grow nervous. Maybe it was all this exercise that had tired his mind as well as his body. He started thinking of all the things that could go wrong, especially with this Leopold on the premises. He wished he knew the name of the person in the sheriff's office who'd tipped off Rohmer. But then he decided the name wouldn't be of much help. The man was obviously loyal to Rohmer, and the doctor was out of the picture now.

But what if Rohmer had lied to him?

What if he'd already phoned Kellogg before Hazard killed him?

He looked through the little notebook he'd taken from Max Guttner's body and found the phone number in Montreal where Kellogg could be reached. But this time he didn't risk using the phone in his room. He went outside and entered Dr. Rohmer's office through the back door. Sitting at the desk where the doctor

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himself had last sat, he put in the call to Montreal.

There was some trouble reaching Kellogg, but finally he came on the line. Voices in the background suggested a party was in progress. "This is Hazard, at the spa."

"Oh, yeah."

"Will I see you tomorrow?"

"Sure. Why not?"

"Dr. Rohmer had to go away suddenly. I was afraid there might have been a change in plan."

"Not on this end. I should get there before midnight."

"Fine."

"You have the money?"

"Don't you worry about that. It's right here."

"See you, then. By the big rock on the north path."

Hazard hung up, feeling better. All was going well. He was being nervous without the slightest cause.

At breakfast in the morning Ed Murray was talking about the roads. "Driving in this part of the country is murder. Don't you agree, Walter?"

Hazard was immediately on guard. Had Murray seen him in Rohmer's car on Tuesday night? "Oh, I don't know. I brought my car up."

"Over these roads? I don't know how you did it!"

"You took the train?"

"A bus, actually. The schedule was better."

Hazard studied the face across the table, trying to picture the man as a detective captain. It could be. It could easily be.

"Going to the lecture on mental health?" Murray asked.

"I suppose so," Hazard said. "Hope I don't fall asleep."

They sat together during the late-morning lecture, in which one of Dr. Rohmer's assistants expounded on the importance of a correct attitude toward life. Yes, thought Hazard, that's one thing I've got—a right attitude toward life. And toward death too.

The room was only about half full, and he couldn't help noticing that both Gibbons and Young were among the missing. "I think Young was going for a run," Murray said in answer to Hazard's question. "And Frank Gibbons wanted a dip in the outside pool. This is the first really warm day we've had."

The lecture ended just before lunchtime, and Hazard hurried to the mail slots. The letter from Margo was there. He recognized

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her slim slanted handwriting at once.

He held his breath and tore it open.

Her note said simply: *Here it is.* He unfolded the clipping and stared at it.

The story was from a Boston newspaper, about a spring visit to the zoo. The picture accompanying it showed a large male gorilla pounding his chest.

Hazard sat down in the lobby, stunned. He knew Margo would never play a trick like this. Someone had got to the mail, removed the letter from its slot while he sat in that damned lecture!

He examined the gummed flap of the envelope. It had been steamed open and resealed with rubber cement. The picture of Leopold had been taken out and this foolish thing substituted. And only one person could have done it—Captain Leopold himself.

The two of them were circling each other like wildcats in the dark, each at a disadvantage. Hazard still didn't know Leopold's cover identity, and Leopold still didn't know the Canadian heroin was arriving that night.

But maybe, just maybe, Leopold had overextended himself.

Because Hazard had been with Ed Murray all morning, sitting right next to him during the lecture, there was no way the white-haired man from Boston could have taken this letter out of the slot and substituted the clipping.

So Ed Murray wasn't Captain Leopold.

And that left just two of them—Gibbons the health nut and Sam Young the silent, with the bullet scar on his side.

One of them was Leopold.

Hazard bit his lip and thought about the gun back in his room. If necessary he could kill them both.

But it would be better just to kill the right one.

Gibbons or Young?

Gibbons' mail slot, the G, would be right next to Hazard's. Gibbons could have taken the letter and returned it later without much risk. And that damned picture of the gorilla! Wasn't a gibbon an ape of some sort? Leopold could be giving him a hint.

But why would he do that? Wouldn't he be more likely to cast suspicion on someone else, on the wrong man?

And why had he left this foolish clipping in the first place?

Of course he had to remove the real picture once he found it, and doing that much was enough to tip his hand. A clipping from

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a handy Boston paper could do no further harm—and in Leopold's view it might even force Hazard's hand. Sam Young might even have left the ape picture to point suspicion at the Gibbons name.

Hazard went back to his room after lunch and got out the .22 pistol. He'd carry it taped to his leg from now on, until he met Kellogg just before midnight. If Gibbons or Young tried to stop him, he'd kill either as he had Dr. Rohmer.

Hazard's car was in a small parking area down the hill from the swimming pool. He was in the habit of checking it each afternoon, though it wasn't likely anyone would try to steal it. He checked it now, making certain no one was blocking him from a quick exit that night, and then he returned to the pool.

Sam Young pulled himself out of the water as Hazard approached, and began drying himself with a towel. "Beautiful day," Hazard remarked.

"Yeah."

He found his eyes drawn again to the scar on the man's side. "You come to these places often?"

"First time."

"Where do you work in Providence?"

"I'm with the city."

"Oh?"

Young finished drying himself and walked away, leaving Hazard standing there. He watched the man go, thinking in that moment that he'd like to kill him whether or not he proved to be Captain Leopold.

He sat by the pool for a time, until the start of the afternoon calisthenics. Then as he was getting up, something made him glance down the hill at his car. It seemed to be at an odd angle, with the rear end lower than the front. He strolled down for a closer look.

Both of his rear tires were flat.

He glanced quickly in all directions, but no one was around. Yet he was sure the tires had been perfectly all right thirty minutes earlier.

Leopold again—who else?

He tried to decide whether Young could have got dressed and out the other door in time to deflate his tires. Probably not, and that only left Gibbons.

Gibbons was Leopold. He was almost certain of it now. All that

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talk of allergies and health spas was part of his cover.

But why deflate his tires? What did Leopold hope to gain?

He wanted to prevent Hazard's escape, obviously. If Hazard called attention to the flat tires, or tried to get them changed or inflated in a hurry, it would be a tipoff that he planned an early departure.

No, better to leave the car as it was and find another way out of there. He could always steal a car if necessary.

As he was passing through the lobby a better idea struck him. That man from town had his card tacked up on the notice board. *Gus's Taxi Service–Day & Night.*

He went to a pay phone and called the number. Gus wasn't in, the woman said. This was the drug store, and should she have Gus call back? No, Hazard told her. He'd call back.

All through dinner he kept his eyes on Frank Gibbons. The man ate heartily, speaking of the appetite he'd worked up. At one point in the conversation he wondered where Dr. Rohmer was, and Ed Murray said, "I hear he's away for a few days."

After dinner Hazard phoned the taxi driver again. This time the woman put him on and Hazard said, "Gus? This is the man you brought up to the health spa the other night. Remember?"

"Yeah, I remember."

"Could you come get me tonight, around midnight?"

"I guess so."

"Don't honk your horn and disturb people. I'll walk down the road to the signpost and meet you there. At midnight. If I'm a few minutes late, wait for me."

"I'll be there."

Hazard hung up and relaxed. For the first time all day he felt some of the tension draining away. It was going to work. In spite of Leopold and his damned gorilla, it was going to come off.

There was one more thing to do and he'd be reasonably safe. He took Dr. Rohmer's keys—his car keys and house keys—from their hiding place in his room and slipped them into the envelope with the money for Kellogg. If the Canadian was caught, or if he tried to double-cross Hazard, he could be blamed for Rohmer's murder. Perhaps he'd have an alibi for the past few days, but it would take time to prove.

Then Hazard opened his toilet kit and took out a bottle of sleeping capsules. He emptied the powder from three capsules into a little fold of paper and tucked this in his pocket. Just in case.

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The evening pinochle game hadn't yet begun, though most of the regulars were assembled in the card room. Hazard sought out Frank Gibbons and suggested they have a little wine. It was the only alcoholic beverage to be found on the premises, so there wasn't a great deal of choice. Hazard poured from the decanter, slipping the sleeping powder into the glass intended for Gibbons. They sat on the terrace, drinking and chatting, and Gibbons passed up his game with the others.

"A fine night," Hazard said.

Gibbons agreed. "Look at that moon! Makes you want to run through the woods!"

After a time Hazard saw the sleeping powder beginning to take effect. "Why did you come here?" he asked Gibbons. "To trap me?"

"W—what?" His head dipped forward onto his chest.

Hazard smiled and stood up. "Sweet dreams, Captain Leopold."

He came off the terrace and strolled toward the woods. He'd have an hour or more to wait, but he liked to be early. He crouched and pulled the tape from his leg again, feeling the cool steel of the gun in his hand. Then he moved deeper into the woods, and presently when he'd found the meeting place he sat down on a rock and lit a cigarette.

Kellogg came up the path a few minutes after eleven, giving the bird call that was his signal. "Are you Hazard?" he asked.

"That's right."

"What happened to old Max?"

"He had an accident."

The Canadian nodded. "Those things happen. You got the money?"

"In this envelope."

Kellogg lit a match to count it. "What are these keys?"

"Do me a favor and throw them away in the woods."

"Huh?"

"Do you have the stuff?"

Kellogg unstrapped a knapsack from his shoulders. "Fifty pounds, uncut."

"Good." Hazard did a quick test with the tip of his tongue. It seemed like the real thing.

"When do you want some more?"

"I'll be in touch. Goodbye for now."

He watched the Canadian hurry back down the trail. They hadn't shaken hands because Hazard was holding the silenced

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pistol in his right hand. The Canadian must have seen it, but in this business such actions weren't that unusual. Hazard glanced at his watch. He had plenty of time to get his suitcase and meet the station wagon.

He hurried back to the spa, where most of the lights were out now, and entered his room. The knapsack went into his suitcase but the pistol stayed in his hand. He was going out the door, weighted down with the heavy luggage, when someone grabbed him in the dark.

He saw the white hair and knew it was Ed Murray.

"Not so fast, mister. I saw you putting something into Frank's drink and he passed out! What's your game, anyway?"

Hazard growled an obscenity and tried to break free, but Murray held him tight. Hazard's right hand came up, unable to get the long-barreled pistol into firing position. Instead, he brought it up and over in an arc, catching Murray across the back of the head. The man's knees buckled and Hazard hit him again.

Then he pointed the weapon at the fallen figure. It was all coming apart—Gibbons and now Murray! Were they both Captain Leopold? But that was crazy.

He realized the silencer had come off the weapon when it hit Murray's skull. He couldn't find it in the dark and he couldn't risk a shot without it. He left Murray lying there and hurried out.

He was panting when he reached the signpost down the road. Gus's station wagon was already there. "You're out of breath," the stocky man told him. "Let me help you with that suitcase."

Hazard brought up the gun. "Don't touch it. Just get in and drive." He slid the suitcase onto the seat ahead of him.

"Sure, mister."

Then, before Hazard realized what was happening, the car door hit his hand holding the gun. He screamed in pain and dropped the weapon, then looked up at the gun in Gus's hand. "Sure, mister," the man said, "I'm driving us right to jail. I'm Captain Leopold."

It was the following afternoon before Leopold was back in his office with Lieutenant Fletcher and Connie Trent. "I saved you some work and our local taxpayers some money," he told Fletcher. "Hazard will be tried in Vermont for killing Dr. Rohmer and we won't have to extradite him unless he beats that rap. Luckily the man he hit on the head wasn't badly hurt."

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Fletcher merely shook his head. "I've got so many questions I don't know where to begin."

"Suppose I just tell you what happened," Leopold said. "I had every intention of going to the spa as a guest until I met this man Gus and saw that he was stocky like me. I paid him to let me take his place for a few days, and he filled me in on the layout of the spa and the daily rounds with the mail and such. The story to the townspeople was that Gus was ill and I was his cousin, filling in for a few days. Hazard took me by surprise on Tuesday and asked if I was Gus, so I said I was, and stuck to that story with him. I told the desk clerk the cousin story. Rohmer, who'd know I wasn't Gus, was killed before he ever saw me."

"How'd you know Hazard killed him?" Connie asked.

"On Tuesday night he came into town on foot, looking for a ride back to the spa. There was marble dust on his shoes, from the quarry outside of town. I got somebody to show me the place the next morning and I found Rohmer's car with his body in the trunk. Rohmer had a stooge in the sheriff's office, but once his body was found that guy just wanted to save his own skin. He admitted tipping off Rohmer that I was coming, so I figured Hazard knew it too. When I saw a letter arrive for him yesterday, I steamed it open and found my picture inside. I substituted a newspaper clipping about the Boston zoo, which properly unnerved Hazard."

Fletcher scowled at Leopold. "Opening mail without a warrant?"

"We won't tell the postal authorities that part. Actually, Hazard was so busy suspecting the other guests of being me that he never thought of the most likely person to tamper with the mail—the person who delivered it every day."

"What about the Canadian?"

"They picked him up trying to recross the border."

"How'd you know Hazard would phone you for a ride last night?" Connie asked.

"Well, I'd given him a ride Tuesday night, and I figured if I let the air out of his tires he might decide to call on me again. If he hadn't, I'd have been waiting for him anyway."

"You let the air out of his tires?"

Captain Leopold grinned. "There's something about this undercover work that brings out the worst in a cop. But for people like Walter Hazard, the worst is none too bad."

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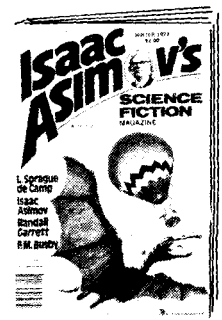

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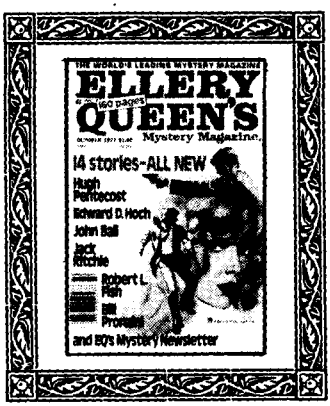

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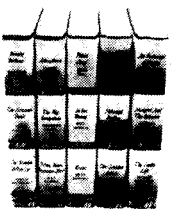

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